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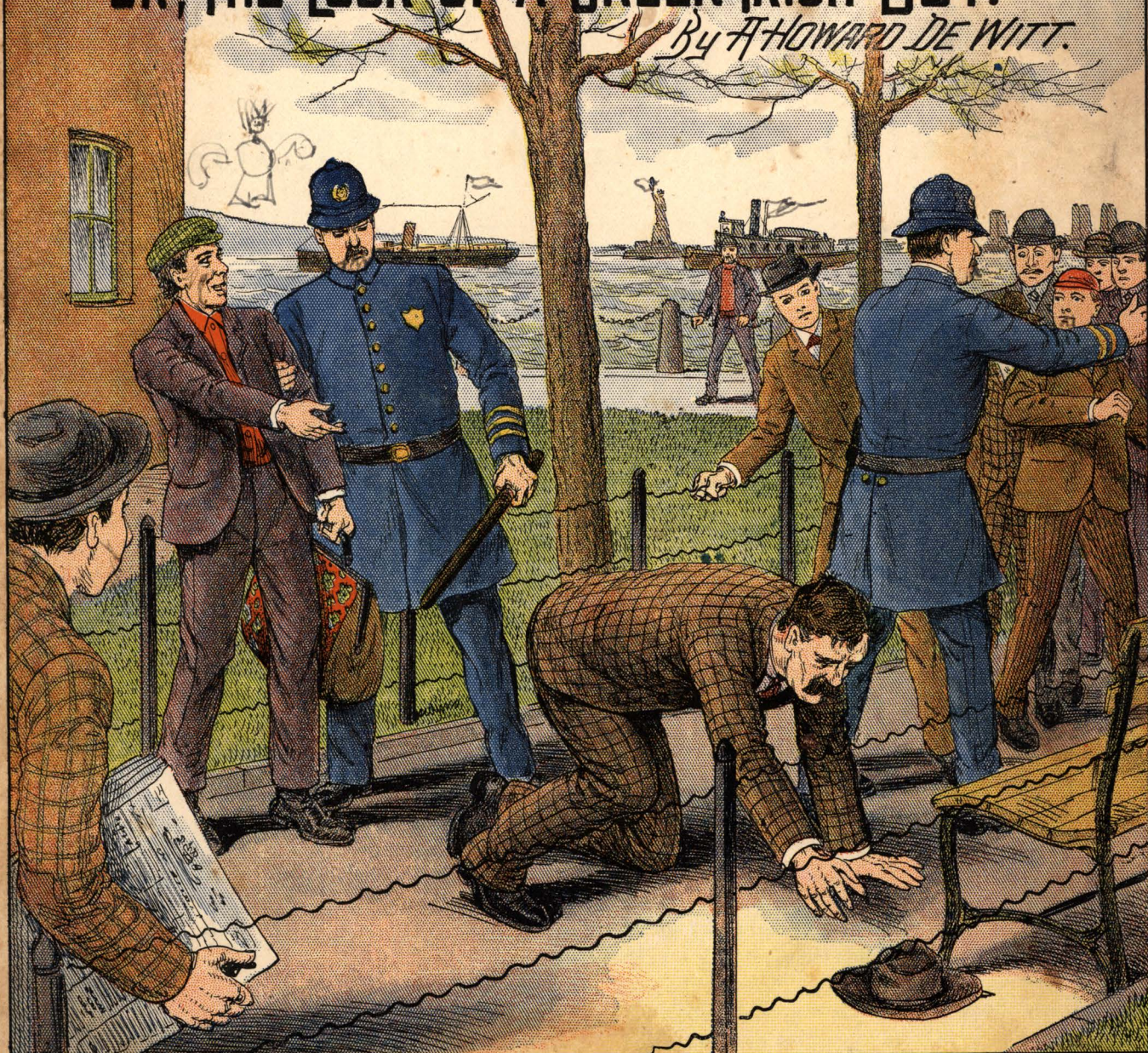
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WIDE AWAKE

A COMPLETE STORY **WEEKLY**. EVERY WEEK.

HIS NAME WAS DENNIS;
OR, THE LUCK OF A GREEN IRISH BOY.

By A. HOWARD DE WITT.



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HIS NAME WAS DENNIS

OR,

THE LUCK OF A GREEN IRISH BOY

By A. HOWARD de WITT

CHAPTER I.

"A BIT AV THE BROGUE, A BIT AV THE BLARNEY, A BIT AV THE FISHT."

The ferryboat was making its last forenoon trip, bearing a motley lot of some two hundred immigrants from Ellis Island to New York.

These immigrants represented nearly all of the countries of Europe.

These people, men, women and children, of all ages, sizes and conditions, had crossed the Atlantic to our shores in the hope of bettering their fortunes.

Wealthy people rarely travel in the steerage. These immigrants were mostly as poor as they looked, and nearly all of them looked poor indeed.

Yet every one of these people had had to pass the immigrant inspectors, who are very strict.

None of these immigrants were crippled, diseased, nor absolutely penniless, else they would not have gotten by the immigrant inspector with permission to land.

Uncle Sam allows none to land on these shores whom he, through his agents, thinks are likely to become helpless and public charges.

These future American citizens who, in a few minutes more, would land at the Barge Office, close to Castle Garden, or Battery Park, as it is known in these days, were, for the most part, a dull-looking lot.

Whatever they might become in future days, they looked, now, as if they took little or no interest in the great and free United States of America.

They had had their days of illness in stuffy steerage quarters; they had been jostled about and even cuffed about by ship's under-stewards; they had regretted, again and again, that they had left home for the new, untried country on the further side of the Atlantic; they had been treated with suspicion, often with rudeness, and sometimes with cruelty while being detained at the immigrant station on Ellis Island.

Now they were headed for the mainland. How could they believe that the trip, so badly begun and made, would end in fortune and happiness?

But one among them could have been seen at a glance to be vastly different from the common run of these immigrants.

His dark hair, his frank, light-blue eyes, the features of his bright, honest face, the cut of his clothes, the way he carried himself—in a word, his general appearance—proclaimed him to be Irish.

His name was Dennis.

The other name was Reardon.

All his belongings that were not on his body were tucked away in a dingy, shabby old carpet-bag that did not bulge much.

His clothes were poor and coarse, though neat.

Yet Dennis was not as poor as most of those around him.

Tucked away inside his clothing was a little sack of bright, golden British sovereigns.

The money represented, besides his fare, all his old mother had been able to scrape together for him.

Those sovereigns represented the savings almost of a lifetime.

And now, while the son toiled in the new country, and saved against the day that he could bring that mother over to live with him, Mrs. Reardon continued a hard-working, drudging servant at the castle of Lord Rayburn, in Tipperary, Ireland.

Dennis was away up by the bow of the ferryboat taking in every new glimpse of America that unfolded before his eyes.

"Sure, 'tis a wonderful city ahead," mused the boy, his eyes glowing. "N' York must be bigger than Dublin!"

A man who had been watching Dennis for some time, unknown to our hero, now stepped forward.

"Your money is in English gold, I suppose?" began this stranger, confidentially.

"Me money, is it?" demanded Dennis, wheeling around upon the fellow and looking him over good-naturedly, but with some natural suspicion. "Whisper! Me money's in a safe place!"

"You want to change your money before you go ashore, you know," went on the stranger.

"Change it to a place thot isn't safe?" questioned Dennis, winking his right eye good-naturedly.

"I see you're as green as most of the Irish lads that come over," laughed the stranger. "You think every one is out to rob you."

"It's more payin' business they might be in," grinned Dennis.

"See here, lad, if you've got any money you want changed," went on the stranger, hurriedly, "you'll have to be quick about it. I can't waste the Government's time."

As the stranger spoke, he poked a thumb and finger in through the arm-hole of his vest, bringing out a bit of his suspender on which was pinned a metal badge.

Across this badge was engraved:

"U. S. Gov't Money Changer."

"You see, I'm not a sharper, but a Government official," the man went on, almost crossly. "If you change your money ashore you'll get only four dollars and a half for each sovereign. That's the bank rate. But the Government, in the interest of immigrants, pays five dollars, the full value, for each sovereign. Thus, if you wish to use the Government money changer, you gain fifty cents, or half a dollar, on every sovereign. Do you want any American money? If so, how much? Talk quick!"

"How much wud Oi gain on thir-r-ty sovs.?" asked Dennis, convinced by the sight of that official badge.

"Fifteen dollars," replied the stranger, promptly.

"An' thot's three pounds savin' in itsilf!" cried Dennis, greatly interested. "Sure, it's a foine thing yure government's doin'."

"For the last time, young man, do you want any money changed?" insisted the stranger, impatiently.

"Oi'm thinkin' Oi do," replied Dennis, reaching in under his shirt and drawing out the little cloth sack.

"How much?" demanded the stranger.

"Thir-r-ty sovs."

"Let me see 'em."

Dennis passed over the little sack. There could be no harm in trusting a Government official.

Rapidly the stranger counted off the thirty golden coins.

Then, as quickly, he shuffled off fifteen ten-dollar bills.

Dennis's sharp eyes followed the counting of the bills, and made sure that it was straight.

"Here you are," declared the stranger, slipping an elastic band around the little roll of money and handing it over.

"Oi'll thank ye for the sack back ag'in," said Dennis.

He received it, dropped the bills into it, and again stored his little horde away in a safe place inside his shirt.

The boat was close to the Barge Office pier now.

The stranger had disappeared by the time that Dennis pressed his way into the crowd that was going ashore.

Dennis had saved out one of the ten-dollar bills, which he now tightly gripped in his right hand, while his carpet-bag hung from his left hand.

Quickly, for there was nothing to see there, the green Irish boy followed the crowd through the Barge Office to the street.

And now he was in New York in earnest—with all its noise and bustle right at hand!

On the sidewalk Dennis stopped, backing up against the building, for he wanted a moment in which to take his first look at the city of gold close at hand.

"Map and guide of New York! Just the thing for a stranger!" proposed a man with a green shade over one eye, shuffling up to where the lad stood. "It tells you all you want to know about New York, and shows you how to find your way around. Only ten cents!"

He held out the little volume.

"Tills me all about N' York, an' how to git around, is it?" queried Dennis. "Thin it must be chape at tin cints."

Out came the ten-dollar bill. He passed it over, watching closely to see to it that the man with the books did not run off with all that money.

But the man, on looking at the bill, thrust it back into the Irish boy's hand, with a contemptuous snort.

"Oi haven't a pinny av change," explained Dennis.

"Aw, stop your kidding!"

"Me—what?"

"Say, Irish, you don't mean to say that's all the kind of money you've got?" demanded the man, jeeringly.

"Sure it is! The Government man changed all me money on the boat."

"And gave you that kind of stuff?" snorted the man.

"What's wrong wid it?" demanded Dennis, beginning to feel queer inside.

"Confederate money!" sniffed the man.

"Confederate money? What koinid is thot?"

"It ain't money at all," leered the man. But, then, feeling some sympathy for this green young victim, the fellow

went on to explain what Confederate money was, and how useless it had been ever since the Civil War.

It didn't take Dennis Reardon more than a second to grasp the situation. Sick and dizzy, he leaned back against the wall for support.

"An' the shcoundrel had a badge on!" he gasped. "A Government badge, at thot."

"Government nothing!" retorted the New Yorker. "Any one can have a badge made. Say, where you going?"

For Dennis, with a sudden yell that would have done an Indian credit, had darted into the Barge Office.

With feverish, staring eyes he searched everywhere in there, but not a glimpse could he catch of the swindler who had gotten away with his bright golden sovereigns.

Still half in doubt, Dennis showed his "money" to one of the uniformed attendants. Then, indeed, he realized to the full how shamelessly he had been cheated just at the threshold of America.

It was a fearful blow, to be alone and penniless in a strange country! But Dennis saw an even worse side to it than that.

"All the savin's me mother iver laid by!" he gulped down.

For a few moments he stood there in the Barge Office, irresolute.

But, by degrees, the strong, natural courage of the boy came to the front.

"What's cracked can gin'rally be minded," he reflected, grimly.

Then the smiles came back to his face. He was no coward. Though there might be a little ache 'way down in the heart, he would show these Yankees that he came of the fighting Reardons of Tipperary, and could stand any kind of a blow.

"Av Oi get a situation Oi'll soon have more money thin Oi lost," he smiled, taking heart.

Outwardly he was as light-hearted as ever when he came out of the Barge Office for the second time.

With not even a cent of change for car-fare, this strapped, green Irish boy buckled manfully to his carpet-bag and determined to walk until he "struck something."

That he was destined to do sooner than he had any idea of.

"Hey, friend!" hailed a rather rough-looking man, darting up to him.

Dennis, who always liked to face and look fully at any man with whom he was doing business, halted, wheeling squarely about, looking his man over keenly.

"More Confederate money he'll be havin'," was the way the green Irish boy sized this chap up.

"Looking for a place to stop and a job that'll bring you good pay, maybe," hinted the stranger, in an oily way.

"Sure, 'twill do no harm to till ye thot Oi am," agreed Dennis.

"Then you're in luck to have met me," went on the other, glibly. "I run one of the finest boarding-houses in New

York City, and I'm an agent for getting help. Five dollars a week for room and board at my place."

"Thot's chape enough," grinned Reardon, to whom, truly, it seemed a most extravagant place.

"And I've a job waiting for a smart Irish lad at fifteen dollars a week. Will you take it?"

"Bedad Oi will!" agreed the green Irish boy, promptly.

"Will you pay me ten dollars for landing the job for you?"

"Is it a shteady situation?"

"Good for all the year around. Have you got the ten dollars?"

"Oi hov," admitted Dennis, his eyes flashing suddenly at the remembrance of those Confederate bills.

"Then the job's yours!" cried the stranger, gleefully. "You're in luck, lad, and so am I! Give me your hand on it!"

The good-humored grin did not fade from Reardon's face. There was nothing in his eyes to indicate what was coming.

But something happened, and happened mighty suddenly.

Reardon's heavy right hand whizzed through the air.

There was a yell, and the stranger turned, reeled, then pitched forward on his hands and face.

A crowd rushed up in a second.

There stood Dennis, smiling all over, the best-natured looking fellow in the world.

Two policemen darted in, one of them pushing back the crowd, while the other laid a hand on the boy's shoulder.

"Hey, Irish, what did you thump the guy for?" demanded the policeman.

"Thoomped him?" chuckled Dennis, pointing to the fallen confidence man. "Bedad, no! He asked me t'give him me hand, an' Oi absint-moindedly forgot an' closed it whin Oi passed it to him!"

"Say, you're O. K.!" smiled the cop. "You win!"

The "con" man had gotten to his feet by this time, but the other policeman grabbed the fellow by the arm.

"Did this fellow get any money from you, Irish?" demanded the second policeman.

"He'd have been shmart av he had," grinned Dennis.

"You get!" ordered the copper of the "con" man, giving him a shove. "If I catch you hanging round these parts again I'll play rough-house with you!"

Growling, the "con" man sneaked away. The crowd dispersed, the cops sauntered on, and Dennis was left alone.

He was not alone long, though, for a tall young man who had been observing the lad from a nearby doorway now stepped up to him.

"You're from Ireland?" began this tall young man.

"'Tis shmart ye are to guess it," grinned the immigrant.

"Oh, I know an Irishman when I see one. I'm one myself."

"Thin it's a credit to the ould counthry thot ye are!"

cried Dennis, looking admiringly at the lithe, athletic figure, the well-groomed clothes and the general, almost unmistakable appearance of the gentleman.

"I'm Larry Fitzgerald, ship news reporter for the Herald," went on the stranger. "I'm not long from Dublin University."

Dennis made a little bow. Irish people have a strong regard for the men from Dublin University.

Just then Larry carelessly displayed his reporter's badge.

"Hould on!" cried Dennis, a queer light coming into his eyes for an instant. "Oi've seen wan av thim bits av tin this mornin'. It cost me just thir-r-rtty sovs."

But Larry laughingly agreed to be identified by the policeman, the Barge Office attendants, or by any one of the many people around there.

Then, with but little coaxing, he got out of the green lad the story of the Confederate bills.

Fitzgerald called for a description of the fellow, but then he shook his head.

"That fellow isn't one of the regular crooks around these parts or we could catch him and make him give up. He won't be this way again, either, for the Confederate bill trick is so old and played out that it's only once in months that it's worked around here."

"Oi wish Oi'd come in yisterday, thin, or to-morrow," sighed Dennis, ruefully.

But in another instant he was smiling again. Reardon was too good-natured, too jolly, to grieve all day about anything.

Larry saw that smile and liked the lad better for it.

"See here," proposed Reporter Fitzgerald, "I'm going to stake you out a bit."

"What koin'd av a thrick is it?" Dennis wanted to know.

"Oh, I'm going to pass you five."

"Pass me foive?" queried the boy, looking at the thumb and fingers of his own red, hard hand. "Sure, Oi wouldn't loike to fight the like av you."

"Oh, it isn't a fight that I'm talking about," laughed Larry. "I'm going to show you my interest in you by lending you five dollars."

"Are yez?" flared up the lad. "Thin it may as well be a foight, afther all. What d'yez take me for? A lad thot'll put in his mouth what his hands hovn't earned?"

"Then you wouldn't accept a little loan?" asked Larry, looking at the boy with interest.

"Oi wouldn't borry money much sooner thin Oi'd shtale it," protested Dennis, indignantly.

"Dennis," cried Larry, who had already learned the lad's name, "I begin to like you better and better. Come along with me. I'm going to see what I can do for you."

"All anny wan can do for me is to get me somethin' av a situation."

"A job, you mean. That's what we call it in America."

"There do be plinty av jobs here, eh?"

"Not so many, Dennis. Why, generally, there are at least a hundred thousand people in New York out of work."

"Is it so?" asked the lad, in dismay. "Thin somebody has been doin' the long lyin' about this counthry."

"Jobs are not so easily found in this country, Dennis. But I'm going to see what I can do for you. A man who writes for the papers in this country has a good many acquaintances. Come."

Dennis followed his new friend down to a room in a little building, which Fitzgerald informed him was the Ship News Office for the ship news reporters for the different New York dailies.

"You have references from the old country?" asked Fitzgerald, turning to the lad.

"Wan charack-ter from Father O'Sullivan," said Dennis, proudly.

"Of what parish?"

"Ballykillan."

"What! In Tipperary?" demanded Fitzgerald, with sudden great interest.

"In ould Tip," returned Dennis, proudly.

"Why, I've been in Ballykillan many a time!" cried Fitzgerald, delightedly.

"An' did ye know his riverence?"

"Well, indeed! I get two or three letters a year from him now."

"Thin ye'll be knowin' his writin'."

"I should say so!"

Fitzgerald grasped the lad's hand delightedly and wrung it.

Then Dennis, his face fairly beaming with honest joy, dove down in his bag and fished up the envelope that contained his "charack-ter."

"That is Father O'Sullivan's writing!" cried the reporter. "I'd know it anywhere. And it's fine things he says about you, Dennis."

"So foine thot av anny wan save his riverence had writen them Oi'd hov me doubts," protested Reardon.

"Dennis, I'm glad you ran across me. To tell you the truth, this 'character' would be worth but little to you in this country, where no one knows Father O'Sullivan——"

"Sure, 'tis their own loss, thin, not his riverence's."

"But now I'll stand back of your character to any one," cried Fitzgerald, delightedly. "Now let's see what I can find for you."

The young immigrant stood beside the telephone, while Fitzgerald called up man after man.

One after another these parties called up stated that they had all the help they could possibly use.

Dennis's face began to lengthen.

But one man asked:

"What kind of a character is your Irishman?"

"He's not a man. He's a boy of about seventeen, but strong enough and brave enough to be a man."

"For the only position that I have open, Mr. Fitzgerald, he would have to be a lad of unquestioned honesty."

"Oh, I'll swear to his honesty, cheerfully, Mr. Lawrence," Fitzgerald replied, earnestly. "He has brought a

certificate of that from a priest who is a friend of mine, and a grand, good man."

"He is that, Father O'Sullivan!" grunted Dennis under his breath.

Truth to tell, the green lad was beginning to feel homesick, and the allusion to Father O'Sullivan brought a tear or two of loneliness to his big, blue eyes.

"Is he bright, this Irish lad of yours?" asked the voice over the telephone.

"As bright as a new penny, Mr. Lawrence. He's a sample of the best of the Irish that come over. 'A bit av the brogue, a bit av the blarney, a bit av the fisht!' He's good-natured, courageous and all-around good fellow and valuable young man."

"I'll have to have a look at your Irish wonder, Fitzgerald," laughed the voice over the 'phone. "Bring him up at once."

Fitzgerald speedily had Dennis and his precious carpet-bag on a car bound up Broadway.

A queer, almost laughable figure Dennis cut as he followed his new friend into one of the biggest, handsomest office buildings on lower Broadway.

People turned to look after the boy and smile.

But Dennis appeared to see none of them.

He carried himself with dignity and pride as he strode after Fitzgerald into the outer office of a big banking house on the ground floor.

"My, my, my, but it's foine here!" whispered Dennis, in awe, as they stood waiting in that gorgeous counting-room after the reporter had sent in his card. "Is it a palace, Mr. Larry?"

"A palace of finance," laughed the reporter.

Though Dennis didn't quite understand, he asked no questions.

In a moment more they were summoned into the private office of the head of the banking house of A. M. Lawrence & Co.

Mr. Lawrence looked the boy over carefully, asked him many questions and carefully read the "charack-ter" from Father O'Sullivan, for the genuineness of which the reporter vouched.

Within ten minutes Dennis had been engaged, at eight dollars per week, to aid the night-watchman of the banking house.

"Eight dollars, is it?" cried Dennis, breathlessly, as he and his valuable friend left the building. "Sure, Oi'll save six av it ivery wake!"

"Not in this country!" laughed Reporter Fitzgerald. "But this job will do well enough until you can fit yourself for something better."

"Oi may be mistaken," muttered Dennis, "but it sames to me thot Oi don't want annything better!"

Fitzgerald went to the further trouble of finding the lad a cheap boarding place.

He left Dennis there, but called for him in season to take him down to his place of work for the first night.

Great beginnings are often made by those who start humbly in banking houses.

But Dennis was destined to make his beginning in a way decidedly out of the ordinary.

CHAPTER II.

"WITHOUT A CHARACTER."

It was in June when Dennis found his job.

By August a great change had come about in him.

He was in the same position, but his fortunes had bettered, for Mr. Lawrence, through business principle rather than generosity, believed in paying liberally the employees whom he was obliged to trust.

Consequently, as a bank depends much upon the honesty of its night-watchmen, Dennis, as soon as he "made good," had been raised to twelve dollars a week.

As he boarded in a flat, with a poor Irish family, where he paid but three dollars and a half a week, the lad had been able to save much.

So far, knowing that his mother was not yet suffering for anything, our green young hero carried his savings around with him, an ever-ready capital.

One hot night in August, having just made his rounds, and found everything snug, Dennis stood by the street door with Pritchard, the head night-watchman.

"Whew! but it's roasting hot," growled Pritchard, who was forty-five and discontented with life as far as he had seen it.

"We can't be changing the weather," grinned Dennis, good-naturedly.

Quick to learn new ways, the boy had dropped much of his brogue, save at times of excitement.

"Life ain't a square deal at all," growled Pritchard, as he lighted a cigar.

It was after one o'clock in the morning, so, while smoking was against the rules for night-watchmen, Pritchard felt in no danger of being caught.

Dennis glanced at the cigar with disapproval. It was one of his own Irish rules to do right himself and mind his own business.

"The big bugs with the money can get out of town when August comes along with its bake oven," growled Pritchard.

"Mr. Lawrence is in town," argued Dennis.

"Oh, yes, but he's been out of town half the summer. And where is he to-night? Sleeping at his club, with an electric fan going in his room."

"Bad seran to him, av he wouldn't take all the comfort he could be payin' for," laughed Dennis.

"While we have to toil and get along like dogs," went on Pritchard, discontentedly.

"Oi dunno so much about that, now," contended the Irish boy, warmly. "Oi'm thinkin' you're in luck to be gettin' yer twenty-five a week as head watchman. There's many a Swede along this street that gets not more'n ten dollars."

"But I'm an educated man," grumbled Pritchard. "I

was cut out for better things than twenty-five dollars a week, and sweltering all through the summer."

"Now, av ye're cut out for better things," asked Dennis, simply, "why don't ye get thim?"

"Because, as I tell you, Reardon, life isn't run as a square deal for most of us."

"Thin Oi must be lucky," grunted Dennis.

"Why?"

"Because Oi'm thankful to have me job, and such elegant pay."

"Bosh!" growled Pritchard. "That's because you're a Mick, and never had anything at all in the old country."

"Oi'm wondering what you had, before you shtruck this job?" Dennis retorted, without taking offense.

"Pooh! There's no satisfaction in talking to you," growled Pritchard, and stepped down the sidewalk a bit.

Dennis did not try to stop him.

"The more some min get, the more they kick, bedad," muttered the boy to himself. "Now, little did Oi think Oi'd have annything as good as this."

He glanced with satisfaction down at his neat blue uniform, with the brass buttons.

Then he took off his visored cap, glancing with pride at the gilt lettering of the words, "Ass't Watchman."

Only the week before the lad had had his photograph taken in that same uniform, and sent a copy home to his old mother.

"If only I knew where Nora was, to send her one!" sighed Dennis. "Oh, Nora, it's me hear-rt ye've set achin' many's the day! An' now the ache's bigger thin ever, for whether ye're alive or dead I dunno!"

His throat began to feel sore from the choking there, and the mist was in his eyes as the Irish lad glanced across the street.

Nora Avleen had been his playmate and later his sweetheart back in the little old parish of Ballykillan.

But six months before, Nora had disappeared.

She had vanished suddenly, without warning or with word left behind.

None in that little Irish village could understand her sudden departure, Dennis least of all.

Her brother, Tom Avleen, was known to be in America, though none knew just where.

But even had her brother taken or sent for her, why should Nora have gone without a word?

"Thot Welshman, Davies, was in Ballykillan about that time," reflected Dennis. "An' he left the same day thot Nora disappeared. But Nora was too swate a gir-rl to go with the loikes av him! So there was nothin' about their goin' at the same time. Och! Well I remimber the good big bating Oi gave Jamesy Nolan, jist for hintin' that the loikes of Nora'd be runnin' away with the loikes av Davies!"

Dennis's throat was getting lumpy, and his eyes wet indeed as he thought of Nora on this stifling August night.

"Getting homesick, eh, Irish?" jeered Pritchard, coming back to the steps. "What's the trouble?"

"How did ye know Oi was homesick?" demanded Dennis.

"I guessed it."

"Thin guess the throuble!" retorted Dennis, a smile breaking out through the mist.

As Pritchard passed him the boy dashed the wet from his eyes and looked out on the dark world once more with a smile.

Two minutes later something happened that drove all other thoughts out of his head.

A man approached, sauntering by. He caught sight of Dennis, halted, stared, then came straight toward our hero.

"Dennis Reardon! Can it be you?"

"Davies, the Welshman, be me sowl!" gasped Dennis.

The other man was holding out his hand. Dennis, though he had no great liking for the fellow, took the hand.

What if this man should know something about Nora Avleen?

"It's glad Oi am t'see ye, Davies," cried the lad, not taking the trouble to explain why he was glad.

"And what are you doing here?" asked the Welshman, looking at the fine manly young fellow and his uniform.

"Helping watch and guard this place," said Dennis, proudly.

"A good position for a greenhorn."

"'Twas Father O'Sullivan got it for me—him an' Larry Fitzgerald," Dennis explained, modestly.

"How long since you've been away from Ballykillan?"

That started the stream of talk. Dennis, with his homesick streak of this night, was glad to talk even to a man he did not like, provided that man had ever been in Ballykillan and had known the people there.

"Walk a bit down to the corner and we can talk," suggested Davies, who was a big, broad-shouldered Welshman of middle age.

Davies would have been a good-looking man had it not been for some hard lines in his face, and his narrow, uneasy, shifting eyes.

"I can't leave me posht of duty," Dennis explained. "Oi'm paid—an' paid well—to help watch these same primises."

"Oh, run along for a few minutes, if you want, Reardon," broke in Pritchard. "It can't do any harm. I'm here, you know, and there are no more rounds to be made for a while. Run along."

That settled it, for Dennis was really eager to talk with Davies.

Perhaps he might know something, might have heard something, of the whereabouts of Nora Avleen!

"Thin Oi'll soon be back, Misther Pritchard," promised Dennis, eagerly jumping at the permission, for he was under the head watchman's orders.

"Take your time, lad," said Pritchard, indulgently. "There's nothing happening to-night that one man can't watch."

Dennis turned and eagerly walked down to the corner.

They stepped just around the corner, where there was some breeze coming up from the North River.

Davies, the Welshman, who looked decidedly prosperous in his expensive straw hat, tan ties and clothes of the latest pattern, had several questions to ask.

Dennis answered them all, easily, as if nothing whatever were on his mind.

But at last he brought the talk around to Tom Avleen.

"Did ye iver see Tom in this counthry?" asked the lad.

"Not once," replied Davies.

"Or his sister, Nora?"

"Why, did she come over to this country?" asked Davies, in evident surprise.

"Oi dunno. She left Ballykillan about the same time ye did yersilf. Oi thought maybe you'd be seein' her on the same shteamer ye came over on," continued Dennis, covertly watching the Welshman's face.

"No, for I didn't come over for nearly three weeks after I left Ballykillan," explained the Welshman.

"Whativer brought ye to Ballykillan?" asked Dennis, curiously.

"Just the love of travel. I've been in your village three times altogether, Dennis."

"Oi remimber all three av thim toimes," nodded the boy. "What d'ye do, annyway, in Ameriky, av Oi'm not makin' too bold?"

"Why, you know, I was always a pretty good machinist, Dennis," replied the Welshman.

"Oi remimber."

"Well, in this country, lad, there's a chance for all kinds of smartness. I've been getting up new machines and patenting 'em."

"An invintor, eh?"

"Yes, yes."

"An' doin' well at it?"

"Well, I've made more than a few thousand at my line," said the Welshman, half boastfully.

He reached into a trousers pocket, rather boastfully taking out a thick roll of bills.

As he did so he displayed the butt of a revolver in his hip-pocket.

"What d'ye carry that thing for?" asked Dennis.

"The revolver? Oh, to protect my cash. You carry one, too, don't you?"

"Yes, because Misther Lawrence asks me to whin Oi'm on duty for the night. But Oi lave the gun in the bank whin I go home in the mornin'."

Davies carried the talk back to Tom and Nora Avleen, and Dennis listened because he was so interested in any talk of his sweetheart.

Once or twice he thought of returning to the door of his place of employment.

It did not seem so important, however, for he knew that Pritchard was there, and, besides, the head watchman, who could summon him by a blast of the whistle, had told him to take his time.

Two men, seemingly in a hurry, turned the corner. Davies talked for a minute or two longer, then added:

"But I've got to be going. It's bed-time."

"Where d'ye live?" asked Dennis.

"I'll send you my card, with the address on it," promised the Welshman.

He shook hands with the boy, then hurried away.

Dennis wheeled and made his way back to the door of the banking house.

He felt half guilty, despite the fact that he had been away by the permission of his chief.

Pritchard was not standing at the doorway.

Dennis hastily entered the counting-room, using his night-key for the purpose.

All looked well there. The great safe, locked, stood where passersby could see it from the street.

From there our hero turned into an inner office.

"Mr. Pritchard!" he called, just before he crossed the threshold.

Immediately he stepped into the room.

Then a great weight seemed to fall upon his head from behind.

He sank to the floor and knew no more.

It was the beginning of broad daylight when Dennis Reardon came out of that trance.

How his head ached!

One searching hand went up to that head.

There was a lump there.

"Sure, it feels as big as a keg!" groaned the boy.

Then he sat up.

As he did so he gave the greatest start of his life.

For the door of the smaller safe of the inner office stood wide open.

Papers and documents lay scattered all over the floor.

And there in a chair just beyond sat Watchman Pritchard, bound and gagged.

With a cry of horror Dennis leaped to his feet.

In two leaps he was beside Pritchard, snatching out the gag and slashing at the ropes that bound the head watchman.

"What happened, man?" cried the green Irish lad, excitedly.

"Fine doings!" groaned Pritchard. "Five men here and the safe has been opened and looted."

"But Oi saw none av this whin Oi came in the room!" gasped Dennis.

"It was done while you were down the street," gasped Pritchard. "The trouble was here, but you hadn't got into the room when one of the scoundrels, hid behind the door, hit you with a piece of gas-pipe, I think it was."

"We mustn't stand here, loike a pack av fools!" gasped the Irish boy, springing to the nearest telephone.

"What are you going to do?"

"Call up the club where Misther Lawrence lives, an' get the wurrud to him!"

"I suppose that's best," admitted Pritchard.

Dennis sent the news as quickly as he could.

Then he and Pritchard took a look into the safe.

Not knowing what had been there, they could not tell the extent of the robbery, if there had really been one.

The papers scattered over the floor were registered bonds, mortgages and other kinds of securities that would be of no value to thieves.

Time passed wretchedly for both of these watchmen until a cab dashed up at the door.

Then in dashed Mr. Lawrence, his face white and convulsed.

"A lot of good it does to keep two watchmen here," he raged, as he flew into the room.

He bent before the safe, only for a few moments.

"All the cash that was in there gone!" raged the banker. "Seventy-two thousand dollars in cash stolen. Oh, you great blockheads, how did it happen?"

"I was pounced upon from behind," explained Pritchard, stammeringly. "How the scoundrels got in here I don't know. But they bound and gagged me, and I had to watch, helplessly, while they went through the safe."

"Where was Dennis Reardon?" thundered Mr. Lawrence.

"He had slipped away for a little while down the street."

"Ye tould me I could go!" cried the Irish lad, anxiously.

"Never said anything of the sort," grumbled Pritchard. "You just went before I knew it."

Dennis gasped.

"So this is the way you have been attending to duty, eh, Reardon?" glowered the banker. "You idle, faithless, worse than useless fellow!"

"D'ye mane t'say thot ye niver tould me Oi cud go?" raged Dennis, glaring at the lying Pritchard.

"Of course I didn't," snorted Pritchard.

"O'i'll bate the truth out av ye, thin!" quavered the boy.

His fists clenched, he made a break for Pritchard.

But Mr. Lawrence got between them.

"Stop that, Reardon!" he cried, sternly. "This is no time for quarrels. This safe has been robbed. It wouldn't have happened if you had been faithful to your trust. A fortune is gone through here. Get out of here! Never let me see your worthless face again! Go, before I forget myself and strike you!"

Dennis did not feel that he could struggle or fight with his outraged employer.

Sullenly the boy permitted himself to be forced into the corridor of the building.

"Go!" raged Mr. Lawrence after him. "I hope you have sense enough to know that you're through here. Go!"

In a towering but helpless rage, Dennis descended the broad steps.

"Discharged!" he glowered within himself. "An' without a charack-ter, too!"

CHAPTER III.

"THOT WELSHMAN."

In his first burst of justifiable rage, Dennis went straight though blindly home.

He got into the flat while all were asleep.

Trembling, he stripped off his uniform, putting on instead his clothing of the day-time.

"There do be plinty av toime to foind thot blackguar-rd Pritchard, an' bate him well for his loies!" throbbed the boy, resentfully. "But, in the meantoime, what'll Oi be doin'? An' Oi can't go near Misther Larry, now me charack-ter is gone!"

Later in the day he was resolved to go and see Father Ryan, the good old priest of the parish in which our hero lived.

It was still, however, much too early to call upon his reverence for advice.

Unable to stay in the house, unable to keep quiet, Denny hastened out into the street.

Motion! He must have that!

In the early morning he unconsciously walked toward Broadway.

Life was already beginning on this great thoroughfare of trade.

But Dennis, almost at the main entrance to the greatest hotel on lower Broadway, suddenly darted into a doorway.

For out of the entrance of the hotel he saw a man coming whose appearance filled the boy with a sudden throb.

"Davies—thot Welshman—bad cess t'him!" quivered the unfortunate youth. "'Twas him coaxed me away from me duty. Why did he do thot? Because he was so glad t' see me? Denny, lad, are yez a fool? What was thot Welshman doin' out so late at night? An', being out so late, what takes him outdoors again so ear-ly in the mornin'?"

Davies was passing, looking straight ahead and walking briskly.

In one hand he carried a satchel.

Peeping out from the doorway, Dennis saw "thot Welshman" stop at the corner, hail a car and board it.

There was another car coming along close behind.

Hardly stopping to think of what he was doing, young Reardon boarded that following car.

Both cars went on, a long way up Broadway.

Then, at one of the cross streets, Davies alighted and took an east-bound car.

Again fortune favored by giving Dennis Reardon a chance to follow on the next car.

The chase led to the Long Island ferry.

Dennis managed to follow his man to Long Island City without being detected.

Buying a paper from a boy, Denny, holding the sheet before his face as if reading, followed close to Davies as the latter went to the ticket office.

"One to Hick's Harbor," our hero heard the Welshman say.

He was two men ahead of our hero in the line.

Davies was well away by the time that Dennis got a chance to call, also, for a ticket to Hick's Harbor.

Then, without much difficulty, but without hurry, Denny found the south-shore train that would take him to Hick's Harbor.

He entered the last car of the train, walking through with his eyes very wide open.

Davies was in a seat in the smoking-car, up at the head of the train.

Dennis dropped into the seat behind the Welshman.

Again that newspaper came into play before the boy's face.

"Wan thing Oi've seen," muttered the boy to himself. "Thot Welshman kapes his eyes all th' toime on the bag thot he's carryin'. Oi'll do much the same meself!"

That early morning train eastward did not carry many passengers.

At the outset, there were about a dozen men in the smoking-car.

One by one these were dropped at stations on the way, all except Davies and our hero.

Never had a youngster seemed fonder of reading!

Dennis kept that paper before his eyes all the time.

Yet, with the point of a pin, he had slyly pricked holes through the paper.

Tiny holes, indeed, they were, but there were many of them, and through them Denny could watch the Welshman every moment of the time.

Once in a while Davies turned around to look behind him.

But always he found that newspaper before the face of the traveler in the seat to the rear.

And then at last wily Dennis lay back in the seat, his head low, as if asleep.

He had spread the newspaper over his face as if to shut out the light, but through the pin-holes he could see his man perfectly.

Two or three times Davies turned to regard his fellow-passenger curiously, but always that newspaper lay over the face.

Then, for good measure, Denny began to snore softly.

Fifteen minutes after Denny began snoring, the only other passenger in the car was doing the same.

"Is thot to fool me?" wondered the quick-witted Irish boy.

He listened, carefully, though not once forgetting to keep up his own snoring.

Davies' snoring became louder and louder, being interrupted now and then by a snort or a start.

Denny began to think that the Welshman's slumber was genuine enough.

The conductor, passing through the car, believed both his smoking-car passengers to be sound asleep.

He smiled at them and passed on.

Feeling the train begin to slow up, as at a station, Dennis Reardon became suddenly very restless.

"Oi wondher av thot Welshman's sleep is the rale thing?" he quavered. "Av he fools me now Oi'm in a bad way with me charack-ter."

For Dennis was now fully convinced that Davies was one of the thieves of the night.

Moreover, our hero felt very certain that at least some of the plunder was being carried in that satchel.

By way of experiment, Dennis gradually ceased his own snoring, then sat upright again, resuming his pretended reading.

But Davies did not stir nor stop snoring.

Back of our hero the car door opened.

"Oakville!" bawled the brakeman.

Denny gave a start when he saw Davies stir ever so little.

But the Welshman quickly resumed his loud snoring.

The car door was open, the train almost at a standstill.

"Now, be me sowl, Oi wish Oi hod Father Ryan here to do me prayin'!" throbbed the Irish lad, as he cautiously stood up.

Davies was still breathing heavily.

Leaning forward, Dennis saw that satchel resting on the seat between the Welshman and the window.

"Now, the saints be wid me!" ejaculated Denny, prayerfully.

Stealthily an arm stole forward over the seat-back.

Down went Denny's hand, the fingers closing tightly on the handle of the satchel.

With no hurry, but much stealth, Reardon brought the satchel up over the seat-back.

Still the Welshman did not stir.

In a twinkling Denny turned and stole out of the car.

He gained the depot platform just as he heard a startled roar from the smoker:

"Oh, where? What? Let me out! Stop him! Stop thief!"

Then Davies' feet could be heard flying down the aisle of the smoking-car toward the door.

"Stop the thief! Catch him! He sat right behind me!" bellowed the angry Welshman.

From a score of car windows the passengers thrust out their heads to look at fugitive Dennis Reardon!

CHAPTER IV.

THE HONEST, IRISH HEART.

Through the open door of the empty station bolted Dennis, with never a look backward.

Right across the station, past a road, stood the great oak forest after which the place was named.

Into the depths of the forest plunged the boy, while excited passengers bawled all at once to Davies, informing him where the "thief" had gone.

Naturally, with so many voices shouting at once, the Welshman heard none of them plainly.

But, after a slight pause, the frantic one got the idea.

He, too, darted through the station and into the forest.

But Denny, some distance into the woods, now dropped into the middle of a clump of bushes where he lay, panting, close to the ground, saw the Welshman.

Davies, after a brief, frenzied halt, hurried onward.

"Glory be!" cheered Denny. "He's takin' the wrong road!"

But the Welshman, fancying he had caught sight of a flying figure in the shadowy depths of the forest beyond,

was now rapidly putting himself at greater and greater distances from his grinning prey.

"May yer wind niver give out, an' may ye run for a hundred years!" chuckled the boy.

Of course, the train could not wait, nor were any of the passengers interested enough to leave the train for the pursuit.

Denny lay where he was for three or four minutes.

Then to his joy he heard and saw a west-bound train steaming up to the depot.

He clambered aboard the train, pulled down a shutter on the forest side and watched through the narrow space underneath.

But up to the time that the train got out of sight Davies did not reappear.

"It's lost ye are, now!" throbbed the boy.

How he longed to peep into that satchel!

Cautiously he tried the catches.

But the satchel was locked tight.

"A sharp knife'll be a key, in the right place, Oi'm thinkin'," the Irish lad throbbed.

It was torment not to be able to solve the problem.

Had he captured the funds that had been stolen from the safe of Lawrence & Co.?

He could not hope to know until he reached the seclusion of his own room.

But, though Denny's head pained him, and his eyes ached for sleep, there could be for him no such thing as slumber until he knew!

It was an accommodation train, and of the slowest kind. Yet, of course, it had to arrive at Long Island City at last.

Over the ferry traveled Dennis, with never a thought that Davies might have telegraphed ahead to the police to arrest him.

Dennis reached New York City.

"An' now, be the shortest route, to me room!" he thrilled.

He was about to board a street car that he knew would take him to his room.

Then, a sudden thought striking him, he drew back.

"Not this mornin'," he grimaced. "Misther Lawrence may be afther thinkin' thot Oi had more'n Oi did to do wid last night's affair. He may be havin' the police watchin' me place av livin'. The police may be on the lookout to arrist me. Sure, what'd they say if they caught me wid a bag containin' all the money?"

So he took a car in another direction, riding until he came to a cheap-looking hotel.

Here he went inside and engaged a room, paying for it in advance.

He could hardly wait until he found himself alone in the room, and the door locked.

Then he whipped out his knife, feverishly cutting open the side of the leather satchel.

Greenbacks! A load of them!

It seemed to Dennis Reardon as if there had never been so much money in the world!

With trembling fingers he drew out all the wealth, heaping up pile after pile of greenbacks on the table.

Then, his eyes dancing, he fell to work counting up the money, which was largely in fives and tens.

At last his task was completed.

"Eighteen thousand dollars!" he gasped.

His first feeling was one of intense disappointment.

He had hoped to find here all the loot taken from the safe of Lawrence & Co."

"Eighteen is wan foorth of siventwo," he muttered.

"Av thot Welshman got his share only, thin there were four min in the robbery! Och! Oi wish Oi could foind the other three as easy!"

But then another thought came that made the boy jump again.

"Av thot Welshman is in wan av these jobs, he's in others. An' av thot's so, he'll be meetin' the shcoundhrels thot help him in it. Is Hick's Harbor where they meet? Or is it where Davies lives? Bedad, Oi'll know thot be-foor manny hours have gone by!"

But, first of all, his throbbing brain was thinking of other things to be done.

Gathering up the money and hiding it, Denny rang for a hotel servant.

He ordered paper and an envelope, and pen and ink. Also he gave the man money with which to buy wrapping paper and sealing wax.

"This is where his riverence, Father Ryan, helps me out," muttered the Irish lad, as he sat down to write a letter.

It was addressed to Mr. Lawrence.

Denny, who knew how to write very well, soon had his epistle finished.

In the letter he told Mr. Lawrence that he had run on the track of one man whom he had thought to be one of the thieves, and that he had recovered a quarter of the booty.

"And I'll have the other three, if it's in human power, and heaven helping me, Mr. Lawrence," young Reardon went on.

His letter wound up with:

"I am sending you, sir, all the money except twenty dollars, which I have taken out to buy me new clothes. If the thief has a description of me it will be by my clothes. I shall buy clothes that look nothing at all like what I have on at this minute."

Then, with a promise that he would not come near his late employer until he had cleared the whole matter up, Dennis signed his name in full.

Then he fell at work wrapping up money and letter together in the thick paper that had been brought to him.

This done, he sealed it very securely with the sealing-wax.

"Denny, me lad, there is money enough here under yer hand so thot ye could live on it the rest av yer days," he murmured.

Then young Reardon laughed at the thought.

There was not blackness enough in the honest, Irish heart that beat within him to make such dishonesty possible.

"Av ye're nover rich until ye shtale it, thin ye'll be a long toime har-rd up, Oi'm thinking," he smiled.

The slashed-up satchel he tossed into the closet in the room.

Then, after wrapping the heavily sealed package in more wrapping paper, the boy left the room and the hotel.

With his mind easier, now, he boarded a car and went on his way toward the parsonage of Father Ryan.

Father Ryan was a rather short, broad-shouldered, somewhat fat man of fifty, who lived in a section of New York where he had the care of the souls of many of the newly arrived immigrants from Ireland.

Jolly by nature, and as indulgent as his duties as priest allowed him to be, Father Ryan was a great favorite with all the boys and youths of his parish.

To Dennis he seemed the grandest priest in the world, next to Father O'Sullivan.

Denny, reaching the parsonage, ran up the steps and pulled at the bell.

Almost in the same instant the front door opened, for Father Ryan was on the point of going out.

"Oh, yer riverence," panted Dennis, darting into the hallway, "'tis glad Oi am thot Oi found yer riverence at home. 'Tis a great thing Oi have to tell ye!"

Seeing from the lad's excited manner that the news really was important, the priest closed the door, then led the way into his little parlor.

"Oh, yer riverence," panted Denny, thrusting the package into the priest's hands, "there's a fortune in real money in this paper. Sind it, yer riverence, to the man whose name is written on the package. 'Tis stolen money, yer riverence, an' Oi'm off after the rest av it!"

"Stolen money!" cried the priest, sternly. "Dennis Reardon, you're not telling me that you're a thief?"

"A thief, Father Ryan? Niver! niver! But now Oi'm off afther the real thieves! Don't lose the money, yer riverence! Don't stop me—please!"

The lad darted from the room and from the house.

"Dennis! Dennis Reardon! Come back here, I say!" shouted the priest.

But Dennis, even if he heard, did not stop in his mad flight as he turned down the street.

A block away he slowed down to an easier speed.

Several blocks away he went into a clothing store.

Here he bought a new outfit of clothing, as different as could be from what he wore.

Then he made fast time to the Long Island ferry.

Again he bought a ticket for Hick's Harbor.

But this time he had half an hour to wait for his train.

"It won't be long before Oi'll be at th' bottom av this thing!" he quivered. "An' may his riverence forgive me whin he knows all av this matther! 'Tis shmall politeness Oi showed him t' his face!"

He could picture Father Ryan, probably at this moment, in the private office of Lawrence & Co.

He could see the head of the banking house and the priest puzzling their heads as to the manner in which a green Irish lad had recovered and returned a part of the stolen booty.

Then came another swift thought, occurring for the first time—a thought that made him jump.

"What av the money in thot satchel didn't belong to Misther Lawrence? Bedad, what av it was Davies' own money?"

Dennis gasped and choked.

It was the first time that even an inkling of such a thought had occurred to him.

"Begorra, thin Oi'm the manest thafe!"

Dazed, white-faced, parched in the mouth and trembling, Dennis hurried from the station.

Air! He had to be out in the open.

For Dennis, reared by his mother and Father O'Sullivan to regard honesty as the greatest virtue that a man can possess, felt as if the earth were moving away from under him.

"What av Oi've shtolen an honest man's money. Och! Wirra! wirra! There's danger aven in being honest, me lad!"

Feverishly, Dennis walked a few blocks through Long Island City.

But the heat of the day drove him back to the depot.

He was too heated inside to stand a long tramp in such weather.

"Bedad," he groaned, "Oi'll niver know another minute's peace until Oi know that Davies is a thafe!"

In his excitement he forgot his train until too late.

By the time he thought of it his train had gone.

There would not be another for more than three hours.

He wanted to go back to New York to consult with Father Ryan about what had best be done.

Yet he dreaded to make the trip.

"His riverence isn't the kind av a man to slape on a matter," groaned the boy. "He has sint the money long ago. It is in Misther Lawrence's safe be this toime!"

So, full of doubts and uncertainties, Dennis hung about the depot.

There was a restaurant there, but he forgot to eat.

"There's wan thing to it," he told himself. "Av Oi foind Davies ain't a thief, thin Oi'll tell him the truth, an' own up, av Oi have to go to jail for it!"

Late in the afternoon he caught a train for Hick's Harbor.

It was just dark when he arrived there.

"An' now thot Oi'm here, what'll Oi do at all, at all?" he wondered, wretchedly.

CHAPTER V.

"THE SWATEST COLLEEN!"

Since he had come to Hick's Harbor on a business that concerned the Welshman, Davies, alone, it soon occurred to Denny Reardon that the most sensible course would be to find out where his man lived or was staying.

Hick's Harbor was such a small place that not more than seven or eight cottages were visible from the depot.

"Where's the town?" asked the Irish lad, of the young-looking station agent.

"What town?" queried the station man, smiling.

"Ah, now, what town do you think Oi'm askin' afther?"

"How should I know, Irish?"

"Ye same to be shmart enough to guess thot Oi'm Irish."

"I can see that right before my face," laughed the station agent.

"Thot's more'n ye can do with Hick's Harbor."

"Oh, it's Hick's Harbor that you want to find, eh, boy?"

"Oi'm glad ye see thot Oi'm not a gir-rl," grinned Dennis, good-naturedly. "Yes, it's Hick's Harbor thot Oi'm afther findin'."

"Well, if you go off up that street over there, about a quarter of a mile, you'll find two stores, with the post-office in one of them," continued the station man.

"And thot's the cinter av the town?"

"It's the business center."

"How big a place is Hick's Harbor?"

"About seven hundred people live here."

"Thin ye must know them all."

"Most of them, I guess."

"Does the Welshman, Davies, live here?"

The station man shook his head.

"I never heard of him, boy."

Denny's heart sank with disappointment, but his rather serious face did not show it.

"What koind av a town is it for invintors?" Denny persisted.

"Inventors? Oh, we've got one here. A big one, too, I guess, by the size of his place and the people he has coming to see him."

"What's his name?"

"Strang. David Strang."

"What does he look loike?" asked Denny, carelessly.

But before the station man had uttered twenty words in answer the boy's pulses began to bound.

The description fitted the Welshman, Davies, to a dot.

Yet Dennis betrayed no excitement.

"Ye said he had a big place?" asked the boy, almost indifferently.

"Well, some folks would call it big. He has some twenty acres, and a house on the ground that didn't cost less than fifteen thousand dollars."

"And he owns it?"

"Of course he does."

"An' he's an invintor?"

"Yes."

"What did he invint?"

"I don't know that I ever heard," replied the station agent. "But I guess it is something to do with machinery, for every now and then Mr. Strang has some tool come to him by freight."

Denny was beginning to be highly interested, though his face did not betray the fact.

He settled down on the edge of the station platform, asking question after question, seemingly in an aimless sort of way.

In the course of the talk, however, he learned that this Mr. Strang, who answered perfectly to the description of Davies, lived down on the same street on which the post-office stood, but a quarter of a mile beyond.

The house could not be mistaken, since it was the only one in town that was built something like a castle, and of gray stone.

Then the station agent began to close up for the night.

While he was doing this, Denny slowly sauntered away.

Once out of sight of the depot, however, the lad quickened his pace to a fast walk.

He would know the place, too, he had been told, from the fact that there were electric lights at the carriage gate and on the porch.

And so, after some vigorous walking, Dennis Reardon came in sight of the home of the man who was known as a successful inventor.

In the shadow of a tree near the gateway Dennis stood regarding what was, to him, a palatial dwelling.

"And Davies owns thot?" he groaned. "An' has the money to kape it up? Then, sure, Oi'm a thafe, bad cess to me! For no man thot owned money enough to kape thot place would iver have t' go 'round the counthry shtalin' more money! A thafe Oi am, bad cess to me! What'll iver Father Ryan say?"

Utterly depressed and wretched, as he gazed at the splendid home of the man whom he had treated as a thief, the lad stood as if unable to move.

"But whoy does he call himself Strang, whin his roight name is Davies?" uttered the boy, suddenly. "Honest min don't nade to change the names their fathers gave thim!"

That was a new puzzle to be thought out.

Dennis pondered over it for the next few minutes, or until his suspicions again became aroused to the sticking point.

Some woman, prettily clad all in fleecy white, and bedecked with flowing ribbons, was coming down the driveway as if for a breath of the evening air.

"Davies' wife, maybe, for she's no servant," thought the boy.

At all events, he did not want to be seen, just now, by any member of the Davies, or Strang, household.

There were flowering bushes close by, and in them Dennis hid himself until this woman should go by.

Nearer and nearer came the woman, stepping softly.

Then she came near enough for Denny to catch sight of her face under the two electric lights over the gateway.

As the lamps were small, the light was not abundant. Yet there was light enough to cause Dennis Reardon the greatest shock—both of joy and pain—that he had ever felt in his life.

"Nora Avleen!" he gasped, and felt choking. "The swatest colleen in all the world!"

It was a face of the purest, most striking Irish beauty that the light of the lamps revealed.

There were the perfect features; olive, yet not dark, was the delicious skin.

The shining black hair and dark, deep-blue eyes of the Irish colleen at her best.

Only one thing was lacking that Denny once had seen there. The laugh seemed to have faded from those sweet eyes.

In fact, the girl, who was hardly past sixteen, sighed just as she passed the bushes.

Denny again choked, his whole being thrilling.

"But maybe 'tis only a sight av ould Oireland she's lonely for," choked down the lad.

Nora had gone slowly by.

Now, with all the stealth of the tiger—and at that moment there was much of the tiger in Denny Reardon—he stole from the bushes.

On tip-toe he went after her, his hands reaching out.

He caught her, his hands over her eyes.

"Nora, ye swatest colleen, guess who it is!" he cried, eagerly.

She checked a scream, which became a gasp.

"Let me go!" she cried, struggling.

"Niver a let, Nora, till ye name the gossoon thot has his two hands over yer handsome eyes!"

"'Tis some wan from the ould town!" cried Nora, her courage coming back to her.

"What town are ye thinkin' av, colleen?"

"Ballykillan."

"Roight!"

Nora remained quiet, not speaking or trying to get the hands from her eyes.

"Speak, colleen!" cried the lad, tremulously. "Who is it from Ballykillan?"

"Danny Regan?"

"Who?" uttered Dennis, in high disgust. "Thot hump-backed, spider-waisted, bandy-legged gossoon?"

"Jamesy O'Hare, thin," proposed Nora.

"What? The fish-peddler's gossoon, thot niver washed himself. Would ye be glad to see Jamesy?"

"Is it Jamesy, thin?" cried Nora.

"'Tis tormentin' me ye are, colleen. Now, who was it thot ye used t' smile yer swatest at whin he came down the lane?"

"Patsy Desmond!"

Dennis felt an uncomfortable sensation. In the old days Patsy had been his most dangerous rival.

He began to feel that Nora was playing the coquette with him.

"Take a look, thin!" he sighed, wearily, and removed his hands.

Nora wheeled about, eagerly.

"Oh, 'tis you, Dinny Reardon, ye impudent gossoon?" cried the girl.

"An' is thot me wilcome, Nora?" he cried, hurt to the core.

But Nora, with a glad laugh, was holding out both her hands to him.

"Thin ye are glad to see me, Nora, darlin'?" he cried, eagerly.

"Glad? Oh, Dinny!"

He drew her to him. She rested her head against his shoulder, and he knew there were tears in her eyes.

"What is it ye're doin' here, Nora?" asked the lad.

"Sure, ye're not the woife av Davies?"

"What? Him?" asked the girl, with scorn in her tone.

"Not thot he has not tried to make me such," she added.

"Oi'll go bail he has!" cried Denny, wrathfully. "But, Nora, darlin', what took ye from Ballykillan so suddinly?"

"Let us walk down the strate a bit, Denny, gossoon," replied Nora, with a strong touch of tenderness in her tone. "Oi wouldn't be wantin' the folks from the house t' see ye."

"An' they'll not want t' be seein' me, av they've started anny tears in yer eyes, Nora. Oh, Nora, as swate and good as iver! The best medicine me eyes ever had."

"An' how long have ye been over, Denny?" asked Nora, her brogue fading as she regained control of herself.

"Two months."

"Not long enough to forget the blarney," she smiled.

"But, Nora, 'twas niver blarney whin Oi tould ye how swate ye was. Sure, Father O'Sullivan said as much, and he's no liar, the saints be good to him! But here we are, talkin' about iverthing except the wan thing Oi want to know. How came ye here, Nora? An' what made ye lave us so suddin? With no word, at all, at all?"

"My brother is with Davies," Nora answered, as they seated themselves on a stone wall on the other side of the street, Denny still holding one of her hands and looking worshippingly into her sweet face.

"Has yer brother changed his name, too?"

Nora looked so hurt that Denny felt stabbed to the soul.

"Yes," she said, flushing and hanging her head.

"Whoy?" asked Denny.

"'Tis something to do about the inventions they're afther getting through the patent office," the girl answered. "I don't understand it, much. But it seems that, not being citizens, they can't take out patents on inventions. So they took American names."

Denny, who knew no better than to accept this explanation also, asked:

"And what's yer brother's new name, darlin'?"

"Sam Lewis."

"A quare name for an Irish gossoon! An' your own name, darlin'?"

"Nora Avleen," replied the girl, proudly. "Do you think, Dinny, I'd be afther changin' my name?"

"But whoy did ye lave Ballykillan without a single word to annybody?"

"'Twas me brother's doings, Denny. I didn't know where he was in this country, but along came Davies, and said me brother was doing well in America, and wanted me over here. Then Davies gave me a letter in Tom's hand-writing. Tom told me to come over with Davies; that he

was doing fine, and soon we'd be able to go back to Ireland, with money enough for all our days. Tom wrote me to say not a word about where I was going to anybody. He wrote he'd explain when I got here. Davies took me to Dublin, and there he put me in the care of a woman who brought me over here. Then Davies brought me out here to Tom."

"An' what was Tom's explanashun, darlin'?"

"I've still to hear it."

"What, colleen? Ye don't know yit?"

"Not yet," answered the girl.

"There's something quare about it all," muttered Denny.

"But, annyway, ye're under the protiction av yer brother."

"My half-brother, you know," Nora interposed.

"'Tis nearly the same thing, darlin'. Ye had the same father. An' Tom, is he good to ye?"

"Oh, yes. But he wants me to marry Davies."

"Bad luck t' thim both, then!" cried Dennis, his eyes flashing.

"But I never will," declared Nora.

"Av course ye won't darlin'. There's a gossoon in the world named Denny Reardon."

"Be still, won't you?" begged the girl, trying to draw her hand away from his, but Denny held on tightly.

"What does Tom Avleen do with Davies?" he asked.

"Works in a shop they have fitted up in the house. Tom always was a good machinist, you know."

"Oi know. And so the two av thim work at machines, do they?"

"They do something about inventions. I don't know what it is. But they seem to make plenty of money, and Davies is a rich man through the things he's invented. Tom makes plenty of money, too. You see how he decks me out."

"Thin Tom bought these foiner things?" asked Denny, half jealously.

"D'ye think, Dinny Reardon, Oi'd be afther lettin' Davies buy thim?" cried Nora, snatching away her hand, this time, in her rage.

She stood before him with blazing eyes.

"Anny toime ye want t' git mad with me, darlin'," protested Dennis, humbly, "jist remimber thot Oi'd kiss the ground yer feet walked on!"

"You always were a good boy, Denny," replied the girl, seating herself again.

"Have ye iver been in thot machine-room?" Dennis asked, thoughtfully.

"Never! Davies and Tom never allow any one there—except men who come to see them on business."

"Oi'd give annything but Nora t' see the inside av that room," mused the lad.

Then and there he made up his mind, by hook or crook, to see the room where Tom Avleen and Davies, the Welshman, did their mysterious work.

"Nora! Nora!" called a voice that carried the young immigrant back to Ballykillan.

"'Tis Brother Tom, callin' me from the house!" cried the girl, rising quickly. "I must be going, Dinny."

"Darlin', say niver a wurrud thot ye'e seen me here this noight."

"Why?" asked the girl, opening her eyes.

"Oi can't tell ye now, Nora, but promise me."

"Then never a word'll I say until you open my lips yourself," promised the girl, placing both her hands in his.

"Faith, Oi'd rather put mine on thim just now," trembled Denny, as he looked at her.

Nora trembled, drew back. It was not for her to permit favors lightly.

Then suddenly, blushing, she bent forward.

Denny kissed her, and felt that there was no need of seeking heaven. It was right here!

"Nora! Nora!"

"Coming!" she called back, through the darkness.

Once more Denny caught her and kissed her.

Then he let go her hands, whispering:

"To-morrow night, Nora, sweetheart, just afther dark!" he whispered.

She nodded as she turned to trip away.

And left Dennis Reardon there altogether too happy for words.

For he understood what that sudden permission to snatch a kiss meant. It was Nora's pledge that the Welshman, Davies, should never win her by wealth, attentions or in any other way.

"The swatest colleen in all the world!" murmured the lad, joyfully, as he saw that white robe vanish in the darkness beyond the gateway.

CHAPTER VI.

CAUGHT AT THE MUZZLE.

Sweet as the game of hearts was, even when played with the prettiest and dearest girl in the world, Dennis had other and sterner matters to think of.

If he could solve the bank robbery mystery that offered the first chance of getting his "character" back.

On the other hand, if he could not prove Davies one of the thieves, then he, Dennis Reardon, was a thief in having taken the satchel from Davies.

"'Tis a har-rd and troublesome thing to think out," muttered the boy, uneasily. "Wirra! Av Oi could but have a look in thot room, thin maybe 'twould be easier."

Almost before he understood what he was doing, he found himself across the road and in the Welshman's handsome grounds.

The darkness of the night favored him.

By means of the four incandescent lights that tawed their glow down over the broad porch, Denny saw that there was no one outside.

The breeze, in fact, that was coming in from the ocean, was making the evening steadily cooler.

Dark clouds overhead, and an occasional rumbling of thunder, gave some promise of a storm coming.

"How'll Oi work it t' get in the house?" Dennis was wondering, as he prowled through the grounds.

He had halted close to a clump of flowering syringa bushes.

As he stood there he heard some one coming.

A second glance showed him that it was Davies, hatless, and smoking a cigar as he strolled.

"Your pardon, sor," hailed Dennis, stepping out from cover. "But, av yer the masther of the place, it's a job Oi'm lookin' for."

Then he stopped, as if overwhelmed by surprise.

"Misther Davies!" he gasped, in a voice of pretended joy. "Sure, 'tis quare Oi'd be turnin' up askin' a job av an old friend loike you!"

"Dennis Reardon?" cried the Welshman.

"The same, Misther Davies," grinned the lad.

"But when I saw you last night you had a job in the city!" cried the Welshman.

"Sure Oi had, an' a good wan, too," Denny replied. "But, Misther Davies, whoile Oi was talkin' with ye the place Oi worked at was robbed, an' 't was foired Oi was—foired without a charack-ter."

"So you came here to me?" demanded the Welshman, coldly.

"Oi didn't know 'twas to you," replied the boy. "They tould me Misther Strang lived here. They tould me, too, thot Misther Strang was the richest man in the town. So sez Oi to meself, sure he'll be the more loikely to nadin' some koind av a servant. Do ye, now?" Denny asked, anxiously. "For ye know me, Mr. Davies, and ye know Oi've a good charack-ter. But nobody else'll give me a chance, because Oi can't show a written charack-ter from the lasht place."

Though he spoke with the greatest earnestness, Dennis realized that the Welshman was watching him keenly through those narrow, cunning slits of eyes.

"How did you ever happen to pick out Hick's Harbor, Reardon?" demanded Davies.

"Sure, Oi was thot desperate t' get a long way from N' York thot Oi asked the man at the railway station to give me a ticket to a place a long way out on th' road," replied the lad, glibly. "The man, he named over several places, an' Oi seemed t' like th' name av Hick's Harbor. An' so Oi came here, Misther Davies. Did it mane luck to me?"

He looked artlessly into the Welshman's eyes as he put this question.

"I don't know," replied the other. "I don't think of any help that I need. Denny, why don't you go West? That's the only country in these days where a green Irish lad has the best chance. Now, if you'd like to go, and will go at once, I'll let you have fifty dollárs to go with."

But Dennis shook his head.

"Why not, now?" cried the Welshman, impatiently.

"'Twould be on borrowed money, Misther Davies."

"What's wrong with that, boy?"

"No good comes av borrowin' money."

"Hang it, then, I'll give it to you."

But Dennis drew himself up proudly.

"Thank ye, Misther Davies. Oi'm not askin' for charity. 'Tis a job Oi want. Maybe, av Oi could see Misther Strang——"

Dennis put this in artfully, but the Welshman cut him short, and angrily, too.

"Hang your impudence, Denny, you know that I'm Strang!"

"Sure, how can thot be?" asked Dennis, with well-pretended surprise. "How can Misther Davies be Misther Strang?"

"Oh, it's a little matter that you wouldn't understand, Denny Reardon. I've had to take an American name in order to get my patents out through the Government."

"Oh, Oi see!" said Dennis, nodding his head, thoughtfully. "Thin ye wouldn't be wantin' me to say thot Oi knew yer name was Davies?"

The Welshman threw away his cigar with a snort of impatience.

"Rest aisy, Misther Davies. Not a wor-rud'll Oi whisper. 'Tis not me should be doing anything t' spoil yer patents on yer invintions."

The Welshman was thinking, and thinking fast.

How to get rid of this green Irish lad, and make sure of his closed mouth?

And then another thought came that made Davies fairly jump inside.

His satchel had been taken on the train that morning. Could Dennis have had any connection with, or knowledge of, that affair?

"What kind of a job do you want, Dennis?" he asked, suddenly.

"Annything at all, Misther Davies."

"What can you do?"

"Annything thot a strong lad can do."

"Come into the house."

"Thin ye'll give me a job?"

"I can't promise that, but I want to talk with you."

The Welshman led the boy not up to the front door, but around the house to a side door.

If Dennis thought this somewhat strange, he did not comment upon it.

"This is my little private office, away from the rest of the house," mentioned the Welshman, as he led the boy into a room.

The place looked like a combination of office, lounging room and smoking-room.

It was an apartment some eighteen feet square.

There was a telephone at the desk, and there were sofas and easy-chairs, while on a table in the center of the room were smokers' articles.

"'Tis a foine little bit av a place," commented Dennis, admiringly.

"Now, what happened to your job in the city?" asked Davies, standing near his desk and surveying the boy through nearly closed eyes.

Dennis gave a wholly straightforward account of what had happened, save for his own subsequent part in shadowing this man before him.

"Do the bank people think they have any clew to the robbers?" asked the Welshman.

"Now, how should Oi know?" demanded Denny, "whin Oi was foired as soon as the boss got to his office."

"I didn't know but you might have heard."

"Sorra a wurrud," replied Denny. "An' 'tis little Oi want to hear, for 'twas thim doings thot took away me job and me charack-ter."

"But haven't you looked in the newspapers?"

"Niver a paper."

"Then you know aboslutely nothing of what the bank people think?"

"Only what the boss said."

"Oh! He said something, then?"

"Too much, Misther Davies."

"What did he say?"

"'Twas to the effiect thot Oi was the biggest blockhead in the wurruld."

"Did he send for detectives?"

"Oi didn't shtay long enough to see, sor."

"Did you hear that the bank had got part of the money back again?"

Davies shot this question out with sudden energy.

As he did so, though his own eyes were very nearly closed, he watched Reardon's eyes closely.

"Now, did they get some av it back?" cried Dennis.

He could not restrain that first little jump of joy, for his first thought was that the Welshman must have seen something about it in the evening papers.

"You don't know anything about that?" persisted the Welshman.

"Niver a wurrud! But Oi hope 'tis true."

"Why?"

"Because, thin, Oi should stand a betther chance av getting a charack-ter from the bank people."

"Why?"

"Because they'll be feeling pleasanter."

Davies turned away, then wheeled back quickly.

A revolver flashed in his hands.

There was a flash, a puff of smoke at the muzzle.

Staggering forward, throwing up his hands, Dennis pitched and fell to the floor.

CHAPTER VII.

"POOR LITTLE NORA—IN THIS LIFE!"

Dennis lay as he had fallen, on his face, still and quiet. For the first few moments Davies did not stir.

Nor did he lower the pistol, from the muzzle of which the smoke still curled softly upwards.

The Welshman appeared transfixed.

He seemed overcome with horror over the first killing that it had ever been his lot to do.

Then, after a bit, he shook himself, roused himself.

With a short gasp, he crossed the floor, standing over that motionless body.

"I wonder if I was a fool?" muttered the Welshman.

He stood looking at that still form.

"Maybe he knew too much, and maybe he didn't know a thing," muttered Davies, barely aloud. "Anyway, if we can get rid of this carcass my mind will be easy over him."

He knelt over the boy for an instant.

No sound of breathing, no moan of pain came from the green Irish lad.

"Never knew what hit him," murmured Davies. "He's dead, all right!"

Then, horrified by the sight of that still figure, he stole on tiptoe across the room.

Opening the door, after thrusting the revolver under a sofa, he stepped out into the hallway and closed the door, the catch securing it.

The instant that he was gone, Dennis sat up, winking at the nearest wall.

"A close call, be me sow!" throbbed the lad. "Av he'd a-felt me pulse—wow!"

Ricing, Dennis tiptoed over to the wall, back of where he had been standing at the time of the shot.

"Thot piece av lead went jist past me ear. Oi should a-thought he'd have seen the bullet-mark on th' wall."

Dennis blinked at the marred wall.

He shivered when he realized what that bullet would have done had it been fired two inches truer to the mark!

"'Tis a bad timper thot Welshman has," he observed, grimly.

He listened, and heard Davies, down the hall, explaining to some one:

"It was an accident, but no harm was done. I was looking at a pistol that I keep in my desk. It went off, but I escaped harm."

"An' so did Oi—good luck t' me shadder!" chuckled the Irish lad.

Then, as he heard no more in the hall outside, and naturally concluded that it was deserted, he tiptoed over to the door.

As has been stated, the door was locked, but the catch was on the inside of this office room.

Dennis had only to turn the catch and the door opened readily.

He peeped out into the hall, but could see no one.

"Oi was wishin' Oi was in th' house," he grimaced. "Now, thot Oi am here, Oi may as well make the most av me chance!"

Closing the door, after setting the catch so that he could retreat back into the office if necessary, Dennis stepped softly down the hall.

Doing so, he came to the foot of a stairway.

"The shop thot Oi'm so curious about must be upstairs," he reflected. "Shall Oi thry to foind it? Oi moight as well."

Up the stairs he went on tiptoe, and never were youngster's ears keener.

"Av Oi meet the blackguar-rd this toime," he reflected, "Oi have the satisfaction av knowin' thot his gun is down in th' office, undher thot sofa. He can't shoot. Whin it comes to fists between the pair av us, Oi'm thinkin' thot Welshman'll draw the second prize!"

Thus, not afraid for his life, Dennis had only the caution of the curious to observe.

Down at the further end of the hall he heard low voices on the other side of a door.

Dennis approached, examining that door.

It had a spring lock on it, like the office door downstairs.

"Now, maybe thot's th' shop," thrilled the boy.

Another door, open, was close to this closed door.

As Dennis heard some one trying the knob of the closed door, he darted in behind the open door.

He was hiding there, in the semi-darkness, when he heard the footsteps of two people passing toward the stairs.

He heard them descending.

In a twinkling more Dennis Reardon was out in the hallway.

Eagerly he tried the door that had the spring lock on it.

As his ear had told him, when he was hiding, that spring lock had not quite caught.

A jiffy more, and Dennis was in the room out of which the other two had just come.

Four or five incandescent lights, all turned on, threw a strong glare of light over the place.

Dennis's very soul throbbed with joy.

"'Tis where they do their invintin'," he exclaimed, gleefully.

There were three work-benches in this room.

At the two smaller benches were lathes, such as may be found in any first-class tool-shop.

But the third bench, the largest of all, which stood in the middle of the room, was littered with many pieces of steel in various stages of manufacture.

On these pieces the lad's eyes rested with eager intelligence.

"It sames to me," he thrilled, "thot all the invintions here are along the lines av keys!"

That discovery made him instantly happy.

These keys that he saw in various stages of completion, were not the ordinary keys of the locksmith.

Mostly, they were long and slender, many-notched and altogether peculiar.

"Av Oi was good at guessin'," muttered the boy, "Oi moight have an idea thot these keys was used for jist such things as happened at the bank lasht noight. To put it plainer, me lad, these keys can't be used for anything much different from—picking locks!"

He was wholly convinced, now, had he needed any proof, that the Welshman owed such fortune as he might possess to a series of daring robberies.

"And 'tis here they make the tools thot they could buy in no honest shop in th' wurruld," he throbbed.

But then came another thought—an awful one that made the Irish lad feel as if he were strangling.

"Poor little Nora—the swate colleen! In this awful life!"

Yet Dennis would have been prepared to slay any one who had dared hint that Nora herself could possibly have any knowledge of the real nature of the business of Davies, and of—

"And of Tom Avleen, too!" gulped down the startled, heart-sick boy. "For 'tis this kind of a machinist he is—making thaves' tools. An' him swate little Nora's brother! Thru, he's only her half-brother, but— Och! It's awful!"

To Dennis there instantly occurred the disgrace that he must bring on even innocent Nora, the dearest being in the world to him, if he should bring out evidence that would result in the arrest of the gang.

"What can Oi do?" he asked, himself, trembling in his distress. "Sure, av Oi don't help in takin' up the thaves, thin Oi'm as bad as anny av them! Wirra! wirra! 'Tis wishin' Oi had Father Ryan here thot Oi am! And—now!"

For he heard light steps coming along the hallway outside.

"They're afther findin' thot the corpse wasn't ready for the wake jist yet," grimaced Dennis, as he looked wildly around him for means of escape or refuge.

There was but one chance.

Under the main bench in the middle of the room was a sort of cupboard, covered in by wire-grated doors.

These doors were not locked, but only caught by hooks.

Swift as thought, Dennis opened one of the doors, crawling in under the bench.

"'Tis the only chance, an' loikely not a good wan at thot," he muttered, as he crouched as far back out of sight as he could.

He had taken the precaution, on first entering this strange room, to make sure that the catch on the door was secure.

Now he heard a key working in the lock.

Then two men stepped softly inside.

Though Reardon could not see them, he could guess that one was sure to be the Welshman.

The other would be likely, therefore, to be Tom Avleen.

But our hero was not long kept in doubt. The voices of both soon told him that he had guessed rightly.

"You were a fool," growled Avleen.

"Softly, now," warned the Welshman.

"What's wrong with me?" demanded Avleen, savagely.

"You haven't grown big neough, Tom Avleen, to be impudent with me."

"You can't be feeling very big yourself, now," snarled Avleen. "You have ruined us."

"I'm afraid so," trembled Davies.

"Sure you have, man. You didn't finish Denny Reardon, as you thought you had. He's got away."

"And now——"

"The lad's no fool."

"Thank ye koindly, Tom," smiled the hidden lad.

"So he'll go to the nearest police," went on Avleen, disheartened.

"Well, he can't find 'em in this town!" cried Davies, triumphantly. "There's no police force here."

"But he'll go to some citizen, who'll telephone the sheriff."

"We've got an hour or more to make our escape in. We hardly need half that time."

"But think," grunted Avleen, "of all we have to leave behind."

"Oh, well," said Davies, coolly, "the game had to be spoiled some day. No one ever went on in our line all his life. The chances are always against us."

"You didn't talk that way, Davies, when you trapped me into this infernal business. I wish I had never seen you. I was an honest man once."

"You never will be again," sneered the Welshman.

"Just because you had to let Denny Reardon get away," groaned Avleen.

"Well, it can't be helped now, man. Of course I'm sorry I didn't put a second bullet in him, to make sure. But it's too late to cry. Get your sister, Nora, and I'll get the automobile out. We'll be in New York before the sheriff gets here and finds us flown. Once in New York I know how to hide until we can escape to some other part of the country. Now, cheer up, Tom. We'll be doing just as good a business near St. Louis, Denver, San Francisco——"

"Oi wish Oi was out av the whole av it!" cried Tom Avleen, tremulously, falling back into the brogue of the old country.

"Well, you're not," retorted Davies. "Now, get Nora, and we'll be away from here in five minutes."

They moved toward the door.

And just now, as fate would have it, Dennis Reardon was fighting the battle of his life.

He was striving to keep back a sneeze that tickled his nose with torment!

"Ker-chew!"

"What's that?" gasped Davies, with his hand on the knob.

With a yell, Tom Avleen darted to the wire-covered doors under the bench.

"It's Denny Reardon himself—and here he is! Come out of that, you sneaking spalpeen!"

Tom was big and husky—far more powerful than our luckless hero.

Tom's twisting wrench dragged the luckless lad out from under the bench.

Davies, the Welshman, hurriedly closing the door and standing with his back to it, uttered an oath—an oath that rang with joy.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE COURT OF CROOKS.

"'Tis Dennis Reardon himself, and no ghost!" cried Tom Avleen, in a voice that sounded frantic with joy.

Davies panted.

"So you didn't get away from us, lad?"

Tom yanked the boy to his feet, but held him tightly.

"So it seems," grinned Denny.

He spoke calmly, but it was the calmness in which he knew lay his only, sole hope of getting out of this scrape alive.

"And you've been hiding here and listening to us?" palpitated Davies.

"Ah, sure, now, there was no harm in thot," coaxed Dennis, with his sweetest smile.

"No harm?"

"No harm?"

Davies and Tom Avleen echoed those words almost in the same breath.

"Sure, no!" declared Reardon.

"No harm to have you know that we're running from the sheriff?" insisted the Welshman.

"Now, why are ye runnin' from the sheriff?" demanded Dennis. "Sure, he has no knowledge thot ye've anny reason for runnin' from him. 'Twill be manny a day, Oi'm thinkin', before he foinds out what ye meant be runnin' in the dead av the noight."

Davies laughed harshly.

"That's so. Hold on to him tightly, Tom. He hasn't told the sheriff yet—and he won't!"

"Av course Oi won't tell the sheriff," proposed Denny, cunningly. "An', av course, Misther Davies, ye're a shmart enough man to know thot Oi have me price for tellin' the sheriff nothin'."

"Your price?" repeated Davies.

Things had been happening so swiftly and so startlingly that the Welshman needed a little time in which to get his wits back.

"Yes, me price; thot's it," declared Denny, with great positiveness. "Ye needn't be afther thryin' t' fool me. There's price enough lyin' around, Misther Davies, in a business thot makes it possible for ye to have such a foine counthry place. Thot's what Oi mean be me price—the chance to do well, jist as ye and Tom ar-re doin'."

"Oh—I—I wonder if I understand you?" cried the Welshman. "You mean that if I put a few thousand dollars in your pocket——"

"'Tis not blackmail Oi'd be forcin' ye to pay!" cried Dennis, with virtuous emphasis. "All Oi want is th' chance to be workin' with ye in the same loine thot's payin' ye so well. Misther Davies, ye didn't dhrop as quick as ye'd ought t' have done, whin Oi shtruck ye for a job outside."

"Did you know, then, what you might look to find in this house?" asked the Welshman, curiously.

"Oi had me ideas."

"Where did you get them?" demanded Tom Avleen.

"From some words Oi overheard Misther Davies say, wanst, back in Ballykillan," lied Dennis, boldly.

The Welshman looked interested at once.

"When were you listening, Dennis?"

"Niver ye moind!" cried the boy. "But Oi heard enough

to tell me where ye was. Fool thot Oi was, whin Oi first came over Oi had the notion thot Oi'd thry to make me way be honest work. But Oi've had me lesson. Whin Oi found meself foired from th' bank, thin Oi knew thot the easiest way was to hunt up Misther Davies, at Hick's Harbor, Long Island!"

He talked boastingly, confidently, in a way that ought to have carried conviction.

"Ye knew me back in the ould counthry, Tom Avleen," the boy went on, earnestly. "Ye know whether Oi'm the bould lad or not. Misther Davies, you, too, saw something av me. Ye can judge, whether in risky work, Oi'd be the wan thot could shtand a good fight. An' Oi believe there's throuble of the koind that calls for men in your loine of work these days."

"Then you understand just what our line of work is?" questioned Davies.

"Oi'd be a fool av Oi didn't," grinned Reardon.

"And you're willing to go into it with us?"

"Av Oi get paid loike a man for brains and muscle."

"Tom," said the Welshman, turning to Avleen, "I believe we were seeing ghosts on clothes-lines."

Tom Avleen heaved a sigh of some relief.

"I hope you're right, Mr. Davies."

"Let's shake hands all around," proposed the Welshman.

Dennis, who had felt Tom's hand slacken away from his coat-collar, thrust out his right hand.

But just then a telephone bell jangled in the room.

Davies wheeled and darted over to the instrument on the wall.

Nora's clear, sweet voice sounded over the wire.

"Mr. Davies, two gentlemen here to see you. Mr. Abbott and Mr. Clark."

"Ask them to come up to the shop, Nora."

"All right, Mr. Davies."

The Welshman turned back to our hero.

"Now we shall be able to put your case before friends of ours," he promised.

Dennis winked at him.

"Business friends av yours, I suppose, Misther Davies," he remarked, knowingly.

The steps of the newcomers were soon heard in the hallway.

Then Davies opened the door to the two visitors.

Dennis remembered them both the instant that he laid eyes on them.

They were the same pair of men who had hurried around the corner the night before when he was talking with Davies, near the robbed bank.

"But av they got away at thot toime," wondered the boy, "who was it soaked me on the head whin Oi went back into th' bank?"

The door was closed and locked.

Davies introduced our hero to the two newcomers, and stated Dennis's proposition that he be taken into the crowd as the condition of his holding his tongue.

Abbott was talkative, Clark inclined to be silent.

Yet both seemed to agree with Davies that the boy would be of use to them.

From then on the talk became friendly.

Tom Avleen, drawing Dennis down to the further end of the big bench, began to talk over Ballykillan times with our hero.

Nora's name was mentioned, though neither spoke of her being in this house, nor even in America.

Once in a while Dennis shot a swift glance toward Davies and his two pals, who were at the other end of the room.

"Oi don't loike the dark looks av thim!" muttered the boy, uneasily, to himself.

Then, of a sudden, when he found the unfriendly eyes of both Clark and Abbott turned on him, our hero shivered.

"Bedad," he groaned, inwardly, "Oi suspect they're puttin' up a job t' stop me tongue foriver."

"Come over here, Denny," called Davies, looking around just then.

CHAPTER IX.

"THE WEIGHT OF EVIDENCE."

"They've thried me, and sintinced me," thought the boy. There was a sudden, awful sinking at his heart.

He knew his great danger.

No longer did he feel that he had been clever enough to fool these scared crooks.

Yet he crossed the room the moment that he was called.

"We've been talking about your case," announced Abbott, while Davies sauntered down to the other end of the room, where Tom Avleen was.

"Oi hope 'twas good ye were sayin' av me," smiled the Irish lad.

"We were talking of how you can make good here," answered Abbott.

"Oh! Well, what did yez conclude?"

"Of course, Reardon, you understand that we operate outside of this house."

"Ye'd have to, unless ye spent yer toime openin' Misther Davies' safe," laughed Dennis.

Clark laughed, too, but our hero did not like the tone of that laugh.

"And we've been thinking," went on Abbott, "that we wouldn't take you outside with us jest yet."

"'Tis little Oi care what Oi do, av Oi get me share of the money," agreed Denny, promptly.

"So, at the first-off," continued Abbott, "we're going to keep you here to learn the good trade from Tom Avleen—who is Sam Lewis here, you must remember."

"Tom and meself will get along," promised Denny. "Sam, Oi mean."

But still our hero, though this talk seemed fair, liked the looks of things no better.

He could not by any means understand why Davies now found it necessary to be talking with Tom in whispers.

But Davies, as if conscious of the boy's gaze, and suspecting our hero's thoughts, came back to them, a smile on his face.

"Gentlemen," hinted the Welshman, "I guess you must be happy by this time. Tom will take you downstairs and find you a bite to eat."

"Which makes me think," grinned Denny, "thot Oi'm hungry meself."

"You can eat by and by," returned the Welshman. "For the next half hour I've got things to talk to you about right here."

Tom promptly led Abbott and Clark from the room.

For just one second Dennis Reardon felt a wild temptation to try to bolt through their ranks, as the door opened, and try to make his escape from the house.

In another instant, however, he realized how worse than useless such a mad effort would be.

The door closed, and Davies turned to our hero.

"Denny," he began, "you're sure that you mean all you say?"

Ting-a-ling!

The telephone bell again summoned the master of the house to the instrument.

And Denny heard his sweetheart's clear voice ask:

"Is Tom there?"

"No."

For just a second or so the Irish lad felt tempted to cry, so that his voice would carry over the wire:

"Nora, this is Denny! For the love av heaven run from the house. Get the neighbors to telephone for the sheriff, for the schoundhrels mean to murder me here!"

But Reardon choked the impulse as soon as it came to him.

Whatever happened, he would not embroil his sweetheart in this nasty business.

"When you see Brother Tom, Mr. Davies," continued the girl's voice, "will ye tell him I'm tired and that I've gone to bed?"

"All right, Nora."

That name must have escaped him when he did not intend it to do so, for, as quickly as he had hung up the receiver the Welshman wheeled around, his face darkening.

"Well," he growled, "now you know she's in the house?"

"Nora? Yes," Denny admitted, calmly.

"Did you know it before?"

"No."

"Didn't you really try to get in here so as to be close to the girl?"

"No."

"Yet, in Ireland, you two were sweethearts."

"Boy and girl," replied Dennis, coolly.

"Aren't you really here after Nora Avleen now?" demanded Davies, jealously.

"Misther Davies," came the spirited reply, "undherstand me, wanst for all, whin there's business on hand Oi wouldn't lose it for anny gir-rl on earth!"

But to himself Dennis devoutly added:

"May Nora an' the other saints forgive me for thot lie!"

But the Welshman, very far from being satisfied, was still scowling.

"Reardon, I may as well tell you the truth," he flashed out, in an ugly tone. "You're trying to fool us all, but you're not succeeding."

"Now, what d' yez mane be thot?" flared the lad.

Both were leaning against the big bench, though at opposite ends.

There was a suspicious scowl on the Welshman's face that made the Irish lad more uneasy.

Was Davies trying to pick a quarrel with him, merely in order to have a better pretext for killing him.

And why were the other three crooks out of the room?

Surely, at such a time, they were not slaves to their stomachs as to hurry away only for a feast.

Dennis measured the Welshman with his eyes, wondering how they would match in a fight.

"But little good would thot do," he reflected. "The others are no doubt jist outside the door!"

Then came the thought that most likely Davies sought only to provoke the boy into starting the fight that would result in the murder of the younger.

"Av Oi iver had anny wits, now is whin Oi need thim!" flashed through the boy's mind, made alert by danger.

"From all I can ever remember of you, Reardon," went on the Welshman, grumblingly, "you were always inclined to be a sneak."

"Thot's it," throbbed Dennis. "He's thryin' t' pick a foight. He wants me to shtart it. Denny, me lad, whisht on yer temper—for yer loife!"

The two were looking at each other keenly.

For a few moments neither spoke, each watching the other as two lions might have done.

Then the unexpected happened.

The electric lights went out.

Davies uttered a snort of impatience.

But Dennis was glad of this accident, if it was an accident, for it gave him something of a chance.

He had become conscious, during the last few minutes, of a fact that he had overlooked through nearly all of the day.

When on duty at the bank he had carried a revolver, as required by his employer.

Usually, Dennis had left the weapon at the bank on going home in the morning.

But on the morning of this day, discharged so unceremoniously, he had carried the revolver home in his hip-pocket.

Then, on changing his watchman's uniform for his other clothes, he had transferred the pistol to his plain clothes, first "breaking" the weapon and taking out the cartridges.

Now, revolver and cartridges rested in his hip-pocket.

So he felt a thrill of joy when the electric light faded.

"Oi don't want to have the loife av a man on me sowl," he muttered, inwardly. "But av it's got to be either me or Davies, thin it won't be me thot gets killed!"

Stealthily, in the dark, he slipped out the revolver.

With equal caution as to silence, he "broke" the weapon at the breach.

Davies could not help hearing a slight sound, though he could not guess what was up.

"What are you doing, Reardon?" he called, sharply.

"Oi jist happened t' think av me doethor, and what he tould me," replied Dennis, innocently.

"Told you? What about?"

"Pills!" murmured the boy, softly, as he drew on the cartridges from that rear pocket.

"Pills?" echoed the Welshman, in surprise. "What about pills?"

"Take two av thim before shleepin'," answered Dennis, as he slipped the cartridges into the weapon.

Then, clearing his throat to cover the click of the breach as he secured it, Denny stood with the loaded revolver in his right hand.

Over at his own end of the bench Davies was stirring uneasily.

What was he doing? the boy wondered, and held the revolver ready for instant use.

Just at that instant the light streamed on again.

Davies caught sight of the boy standing there, coolly, grimly, looking as if it would give him all pleasure to use the gun.

Davies started back in terror.

"What are you up to, Reardon?" he demanded.

"Jist what Oi was goin' t' ask yersilf, Misther Davies."

"But that gun——"

"Is me best friend in this house, Oi'm thinkin'."

"Nonsense, you crazy idiot! You don't need a pistol among friends."

"Av Oi have friends in this house, Misther Davies," retorted the boy, sarcastically, "thin it's because wan friend, whin it happens to be a gun, brings other friends!"

"What do you mean by that, Denny?" asked the Welshman, coaxingly.

"Misther Davies, jist before the loight wint out, it shtruck me thot ye was thryin' to pick a quarrel with me."

"Why should I do such a silly thing as that?"

"Your own reasons must be best known to yersilf, sor," replied the boy, stubbornly. "But, as for mesilf, Oi've such faith in yer good intintions thot Oi ask ye t' lead me to the front door. Whin Oi'm on the other side av thot Oi'll have a better idea av yer friendliness."

"But, my dear boy——"

"Ye're a Welshman, Davies, so it's no use at all for ye to thry to blarney," retorted the boy, stubbornly. "Oi don't thrust ye—not a bit. Oi don't want t' hurt ye, but, be me sowl, Oi'd pump ye with a ton av lead before Oi'd shtand for a funeral in the Reardon family. So shtand aside an' let me through thot door!"

But just at that instant voices sounded on the other side of the door.

Then a key slipped into the lock.

"Don't thry to come through thot door!" yelled Denny, warningly. "Oi have a gun in me hand, an' the Welshman pays the piper av thot door moves!"

"The young scoundrel is holding me up!" raged Davies.

"We don't need yer swate voice in this song!" warned Reardon, menacing his enemy with the revolver.

"But you're wronging me, Dennis," insisted the Welshman.

"Is thot so?" asked the boy, wonderingly.

"We've treated you fairly and squarely, and now it seems that all the while you've got in here among us just to betray us."

"Did Oi thot?" demanded the boy, wrathfully. "Didn't Oi offer to join yez, and thin didn't ye begin to plot to get me into a timper, so ye could finish me?"

"The weight of evidence is the other way," retorted the Welshman, smiling coldly.

He put an especial emphasis on that word "weight."

Had Dennis been looking upward he would have discovered what was meant.

In the ceiling overhead, just over the spot where the boy was standing, a trap-door was noiselessly raised.

Now appeared there the evil faces of Clark and Abbott.

Between them they poised a heavy iron weight through the open trap-way.

Directly over the boy's head they held it, then dropped that crushing weight.

CHAPTER X.

IN THE JAWS OF THE TRAP.

Davies looked on in grim, fascinated horror as he saw the crushing weight poised and launched at the Irish boy's head.

Crash! It struck.

But Dennis had side-stepped just in time.

A shadow on the floor warned him in the nick of time.

Not waiting to look up, he bounded aside.

"Ye murdering scoundrels!" he roared, aiming the revolver at the trap-door.

Click! The trap closed.

Clack!

Davies, profiting by Denny's instant look upward, had bolted for the door.

He pulled it open, bolting through, while Reardon wheeled, aiming the revolver at him.

Too late for a shot, even had Denny wanted to fire.

And now, another——

Click!

"That's the padlock on the outside av the door!" groaned the boy. "Well, Oi'm in a foine thrap now, waitin' for the scoundhrels to take me out."

Of course, there were the windows, but the gossoon had an idea that these had been thought of.

Nevertheless, he darted to one of the windows, pulling aside the heavy woollen drapery.

"Jist as Oi thought!" he muttered, but he was disappointed, nevertheless.

He was staring at a heavy wooden shutter that completely covered the window.

Though he did not know it, these windows were "fixed" for observation by the curious on the outside.

Denny examined the other window of the room. Just as he had expected, this was guarded in the same manner.

"But a smart gossoon loike me might manage t' dig through some av that wood," he muttered.

There were edged tools enough lying about on the benches.

With the broadest, heaviest chisel that he could find, young Reardon began to gouge away the wood.

It came in good-sized strips as he worked.

Clank!

"Och! The villains!" gasped Denny. "Oi moight have known it!"

The tool in his hand had turned against the surface of a heavy iron plate.

"They niver wanted anny wan to get in. It's aiqually harrud for anny wan t' get out," grumbled the boy, throbbing over this latest discovery.

From that he turned to the work-bench, which was almost under the trap that had been opened for dropping the weight.

But the room was sixteen feet high. The bench was three feet high, and Denny about five feet nine.

That left rather too many feet for a jump upward at the trap, even had that been open.

"But they've taken good enough pains to make sure av its bein' tight," grimaced the trapped boy. "Thim scoundhrels don't forget manny things."

His brain still active with the only problem before him, that of escape—somehow—Dennis looked down at the iron weight that rested on the door.

He tried to pick it up. It must have weighed at least a hundred pounds.

"'Tis a man's lift," muttered Denny, spitting on his hands and trying again.

This time he got the weight to his shoulder, balancing it there.

Then back a few steps he went, next moved quickly upon the door.

Crash! Splinter!

The weight fell with a heavy thud. The wooden panels of the door between him and freedom were splintered.

"'Tis little thim byes don't think av," groaned Denny, as he glared at the shattered strips of wood.

Inside the wood filling of the door was a massive iron plate.

"Even the walls must be av iron!" groaned the boy. "Sure, Oi may as well wait until some one lets me out av here."

But would any one take such trouble?

Denny realized that he had no way of sending word to the outside world.

Then another horrible thought came to him.

This room now had no ventilation whatever.

If he stayed here long enough he would die in the gradually fouling air.

"That's the meaning av the thrap," he decided. "To let fresh air in here whin it's naded."

Dennis Reardon looked about him, dumbly.

Though he would not admit it, even to himself, his despair was swiftly growing.

"It's a toight box, this," he muttered. "But there must be some way out av it."

He glanced at the many tools, half-done and finished, that lay upon the benches.

There seemed to be an especial mockery in them.

Had it not been that the door was double-locked by a padlock on the outside, this ingenious gossoon could speedily have found a way of picking any other kind of lock that stood between him and freedom.

Having exhausted all his ideas, Denny picked up his revolver again and sat down.

He remained there, looking slowly, almost stupidly around him in his helplessness.

Soon he heard a titter from the ceiling.

Glancing swiftly up, he saw the trap-way open again.

But there was no head, no part of a body, nothing in sight to shoot at.

"Show yersilf!" pleaded Denny, grimly.

A mocking laugh was the only immediate response.

"Oi want t' sind ye me compliments!" growled the imprisoned boy. "For scoundhrels, ye're about the meanest an' slickest Oi ever heard av."

"We're too clever for a green Irish lad!" mocked the voice of the Welshman.

"Ye are thot," Denny agreed. "An' ye have me in an illigant thrap. But what's it all for?"

"For safe-keeping," laughed the invisible Welshman.

"An' how long d'ye think Oi'll kape, this way?" Denny demanded, with interest.

"You'll keep until you spoil," laughed Davies, harshly.

"An' is thot the game?"

"Is what the game?"

"Murther—be inches?"

"We don't intend to take you out of there, if that's what you want to know," replied the victor in this night's contest of wits.

"Davies," hinted the Irish lad, artfully, "ye don't thrust aven yersilf, do yez?"

"Why?"

"Look at the way ye've used me!"

"Bosh! You came here bent on ruining us!"

"Did Oi so?" inquired Denny, calmly. "Didn't Oi offer t' throw the lasht schrap av me charac-ter into yer payin' business?"

"And then showed fight."

"Why shouldn't Oi?" demanded the boy, with a mild show of spirit. "But did Oi shtart it? Wasn't Oi on the fair with ye? And didn't Oi mane all Oi said, till ye began to plan t' cut me off from me loife?"

"I don't trust you. It's bad judgment, anyway, Reardon, to have too many folks around who have to be trusted."

"Did ye think Oi was such a fool thot Oi couldn't be

thrusted to kape me mouth shut and mesilf busy, whin Oi had a chance to make money fast, like the rist av yez?"

"That was only talk to help you to get away from us."

"Thin ye think Oi'm ralely a fool," uttered Dennis, in pretended disgust.

"I think I'm not fool enough to trust you until you put us all behind the bars."

"D'ye think Oi belong to the police?" challenged Dennis.

"That's supposed to be the ambition of the Irishmen who come over to this country," laughed the Welshman. "But I'm positive that you'll never be an American policeman, Reardon. You're never going to get out of this trap alive!"

Clack!

The trap was back in place again.

"An' he manes it—the murthering scoundhrel!" grieved Dennis, leaping to his feet in a new rage.

Now he hunted wildly about for anything, overlooked before, that would seem to offer any hope of a way to escape.

But he found no hope at all in that closely sealed room. Tinkle!

It was a single, soft peal on the telephone bell.

Denny heard it and stopped still.

He stood regarding the instrument, strongly tempted to find out what that single, short ring meant, yet suspecting some new trick.

But at last he mustered up the determination to cross the room, just as another tinkle sounded.

"Hullo!" he called, softly.

Back came the agonized appeal, in a quivering whisper:

"Oh, Dinny lad, for the love av heaven, is that you?"

"'Tis me, all roight, Nora, darlin'!" responded the gossoon, in an overjoyed whisper that matched the colleen's for softness.

"Oh, Dinny, 'tis awful! What can I do to help you?"

"How did ye know Oi was in throuble, swateheart?"

"Do you remember, Dinny, when I telephoned that I was going to bed?"

"Yes, yes!"

"That was to throw Davies off the track. For I'd been listening over the wire, and I mistrusted but something was wrong. I wasn't long in doubt about that, either, Dinny!"

"Where are ye, now, darlin'?" whispered the boy.

"In the little room downstairs where the switchboard is, that connects the main telephone with the other parts of the house."

"Why, thin, little swateheart," chuckled Dennis, in his hoarse whisper, "'tis aisy!"

"How? What?"

"Call up the Cinthral Office. Tell her thot there's a prisoner locked up in this house. Tell her thot there's bank robbers here, too, bad cess to thim! Tell her to call up some police officers, somewhere, an' git 'em to hurry here on the double jump!"

"Oh, Dinny, I've tried that!"

"Yes, yes, darlin'?"

"And I couldn't get any answer," came the girl's wail-

ing whisper. "Sure, the wire must be cut outside the house!"

"Av course! av course!" wailed Dennis. "I could have known it. Thim scoundhrels don't forgit t' think av everything. But, Nora, darlin', can't ye escape and run somewhere with the news?"

"Oh, Dinny, I'm locked in here!"

"Och! T' be sure," grieved the boy. "But the winders?"

"They're boarded so that no one can get in or out through them."

"T' be sure again!" groaned the upstairs prisoner. "Darlin', ye're as much a prisoner as Oi am mesilf. But av ye should get out——"

"Dinny!" came the reproachful whisper. "Do you think I'd forget about you?"

Talking in whispers as they were, both felt secure from being overheard by any eavesdroppers in nearby rooms or hallways.

But now the colleen's voice took on a new note of terror.

"Oh, Dinny, lad!"

"Swateheart!"

"Do you smell it?"

"What?"

"Smoke!"

"Divil a bit!"

"But I do! Oh, Dinny!"

"Nora?"

"Can't you guess?"

"What?"

"Fire!"

"What can you be meaning, colleen?"

"Can't you guess, Dinny?"

"T' be sure Oi can't!"

"Oh, Dinny——"

"Spake quick, swateheart."

"They've set the house afire!"

"What's that ye're sayin'?" gasped the imprisoned boy, almost reeling back from the telephone.

"That's what they're thrying to do to you, lad!" came the wailing accents.

"Sure, would they forget anything, the murthering scoundhrels!" ground out the boy, desperately. "But, Nora, think av the foolishness av it! Thot can't be what they mane. Davies wouldn't be afther destroying a foiné palace loike this!"

"Why not? What use is it to him, since he must run away and hide?"

That broke down Dennis's last hope that the rascals didn't mean to burn down the place.

It was all too plain, now. The gang, having no further use for the place, would use it to destroy the sole human being who could put the authorities on their track.

Unless Nora betrayed them!

That thought gave the boy another sudden, utter heart-ache.

Would they destroy the girl, too, to insure their safety?

"Darlin'!" sounded Dennis's hoarse whisper.

"Lad?"

"What'll they do with you?"

"'Tis not myself I'm caring about."

"But Oi am. Will they desthroy ye, too?"

"Small fear, I think, Dinny. Davies still has a foolish idea that he can scare me, or coax me, into becoming his wife."

"But ye niver will, Nora," shouted out Denny, appealingly.

"If you're left t' die in this house, Dennis, 'tis myself that will be always the banshee that'll be hurrying the Welshman into his own grave. 'Tis no peace he'll ever know if he lets me keep near him!"

Nora Avleen's voice, though low, was at the pitch of fury.

Well, then, did Dennis Reardon know how he was loved by this dark-haired slip of a colleen!

"Dinny!"

"Swateheart?"

"I think they're coming for me. I hear steps. Maybe I can't talk to you any longer, but you can listen here at the wire, to hear anything that may be said!"

"Me ear'll be glued to this wooden box!"

"Good-by, Dinny—if I have to say it for the last time!"

"Nora, darlin', good-by."

"Dinny!"

"Swateheart?"

"I'll tell you what I've never told you before. I love you!"

"Swateheart, d' ye aven nade t' hear me say thot?"

Over that short strip of wire they pledged their love, even with one of them, at least, hopelessly facing death.

Clack! It was the trap-cover going up.

Impatiently, Denny dropped the receiver, bounding to a place beside the bench.

"Reardon!" called down the Welshman's husky voice.

"Are ye there, ye divvle?" glowered the Irish boy.

Davies was keeping his face and his whole body out of possible range of the revolver that the lad handled.

"It's just to say good-bye, Reardon!" mocked the Welshman. "If you don't smell smoke now, you may soon! We've set the house afire, in one of the rooms downstairs. The flames will travel into the room under you. In the room under you is a keg of blasting powder. When the keg gets hot, which will be within ten minutes——"

"Ye fiend!" roared Dennis.

"The house will be blown to marbles," chuckled the Welshman, hoarsely. "Oh, lad, your mother knew what she was about, at the christening, when she said your name was Dennis!"

"Ye——"

Clack! The trap had closed again.

Dennis flew back to the telephone at the wall, snatching up the receiver and holding it hard to his ear.

He was doomed himself!

He knew and believed it now.

But Nora, the sweetest of colleens?

Was this to be her last night of life, too?

Wholly forgetting himself in that awful moment, Dennis Reardon waited for the faintest sound that could come to him over the wire.

CHAPTER XI.

NORA'S ONLY DEFENDER.

Nora had crouched on the floor, her head huddled into a pillow on a sofa.

Her form shook, and sobbed slowly but deeply.

So she was when the door, after the trying of a key, was opened.

"Nora!" cried Tom Avleen, going shame-facedly over to her.

"Tom!"

The girl started up eagerly, then drew back, her eyes big with horror when she saw that Clarke and Abbott had entered with her half-brother.

"Nora, this is no place for you," Tom hurried on. "We're going."

"You and I only, Tom? Or do these—monsters!—go with us?"

"All together, Nora. We're all in the same boat!" cried Tom, going closer to her.

He tried to rest a hand on her arm, but the colleen drew shudderingly away from him.

"And ye're leaving Dinny here—to meet his death!" she cried.

"Nora, we must. The gossoon'd put us all in prison if he got away this night!"

"Oh, Tom! Tom! Not until this night did I know that your mother bore you to wear the brand of the criminal!"

Tom Avleen started and flushed.

"Tell the girl to shut up!" growled Abbott.

Tom wheeled swiftly, sending back a scowl over his shoulder at his abrupt pal.

"Leave the girl alone!" he said, curtly. "Poor colleen, I can't blame her."

"This is the worst of having women around," growled Clark. "They always go into hysterics when they ought to do something worth while. If the girl's your sister, you've got to make her do what's right. If you can't make her hold her tongue, you'd better cut it out."

But Nora, wholly unafraid, vile as she knew these men to be, stood by the sofa, looking at them with the haughty disdain of a queen.

Davies hurried into the room.

"Davies, are you a man or a fiend?" cried Nora, sharply.

"What's the matter, now, girl?" demanded the Welshman, roughly.

"You're sending Dinny Reardon to his death."

"It's either that, girl, or he'd send us behind bars."

"And why are you so sure I'll not do it myself?" glared the colleen.

Davies whitened as he glared at her.

Then an oath leaped to his lips.

"Nora, you'll keep quiet, for all time to come—or I'll find the way to make you."

"Davies, I tell you to your face, now," cried the girl, passionately, "if you leave Dinny to his death I'll be the banshee that'll haunt you down to the bottom of the foulest grave on this earth!"

The Welshman, though white and shaking, glared at the girl.

What he saw in her eyes told him that she meant all she said.

"Then, you hussy, you'll never talk!"

Half-choking in his ugly rage, the Welshman leaped at the girl, his fist uplifted.

But quicker than he, and whiter-faced, was husky Tom Avleen.

He got between the two.

Biff!

Davies went to the floor, as a tree falls in the forest.

Abbott and Clark rushed forward to interfere, but Tom Avleen, the best side of his nature now thoroughly aroused, laid his heavy fists about him like a steam hammer gone mad.

Clark and Abbott went down as easily as their leader had done.

Over the three towered Nora's half-brother, his eyes aflame with the lust of battle.

"You can get up when you'll behave yourselves like men!" he roared. "Not before. Don't dare try to get up until you agree to keep your hands off, and your tongue still, about the poor colleen. I'm her only defender!"

With the house afire, and a mine of blasting-powder laid, it was no time for sticking at trifles.

Almost in the same breath all three of the fallen ruffians apologized, then got upon their feet.

"Avleen, you fool!" roared the Welshman, glaring about him.

For in the excitement Nora had promptly fled through the open door.

He was on the point of pursuing her, that Welshman, when husky Tom laid a hand on his coat-collar and jerked him back.

"Davies, you scoundrel!" panted Avleen. "If you harm a hair on that colleen's head you'll never know what hit ye!"

"Come with me, then!" panted the Welshman. "Help me find the girl. It's no time to linger here, when any minute may see the house in pebbles!"

All four of the men ran out of doors, for now the smoke was pouring through the whole lower part of the house.

"We must be quick!" panted the Welshman. "It ain't safe to count on five minutes more to the blow-up! I've got the auto out and ready for the trip."

"But the girl?" cried Abbott, desperately.

"If we can't find her we must go without her!" cried the Welshman. "It's ourselves we've got to save first."

"The jade has run for help. That's where she's gone!" gritted Clark.

"She can bring no help in time to save that Irish lad," grimaced Davies, pointing to the house. "The fire depart-

ment of this town couldn't save the house now, if it was on the spot. And no man would go in there, knowing the powder to be in that room. Come on! To the auto! If we can pick up the girl on the way, well and good!"

Denny, listening at the telephone, had been able to guess how things had gone in that room downstairs.

"God bless you, Tom Avleen!" murmured the boy. "Oi can niver hate ye after thot!"

As soon as he realized that the room downstairs was empty of human beings, Dennis Reardon turned, white with despair, to confront his own fearful situation.

Sneeze!

Tight as were the walls and floor of his prison room, the all-pervading smoke was beginning to filter through them now.

Dennis began to choke and cough.

He wondered whether the smoke would finish him before the powder became hot enough to put on the last touch of the night?

Then the instinct of self-preservation asserted itself strongly.

There being nothing sane and reasonable that he could do, the doomed one soon began to bound and race about the room, pounding against door and sealed windows, thumping at the floor.

He even started to pile one of the smaller benches a-top of the larger one.

He had a wild notion that if he could reach the trap above, he might be able to force it.

Before he had gotten the smaller bench on top of the larger one he gave up the plan for another wild one that raced into his tormented head.

"How long before the powder——"

Toot!

That sound came from the automobile horn.

Denny understood, wild as his head was.

Davies and his gang, safely in the touring car, and about to rush to safety, had sent that blast of the horn as their last derisive salute to their victim.

"Well can they laugh!" growled the lad.

Then, getting a grip on himself, he became calmer.

Now he prepared himself to face, as beyond doubt, the fact that he was standing only briefly in the face of death.

A calmness descended upon the boy.

Well taught in his religious duties at home, Dennis Reardon sank down upon his knees.

His head bent reverently, his lips moved without excitement.

He was praying for the future of his soul!

CHAPTER XII.

CONCLUSION.

For some minutes the boy's lips moved in prayer.

Every tremor, every fear, every last thought of earth had gone from him.

So, still praying, he would be ready for the huge blast, whenever it came.

Boom! Dennis heard, but did not even quiver. His lips kept on moving.

He may have wondered, vaguely, why the first explosion should be so light a one, but his thoughts were on the heaven of his faith.

Boom! boom!

What mattered it how the explosions came?

When the big one came he likely would not hear it at all.

Since it must come—that great explosion—let it!

He was ready—more than ready. His honest heart had found its peace with heaven.

Boom! boom! Crash!

“Dinny!”

Dennis Reardon looked up with a start that he felt, even in this holy moment.

He stared bewilderedly, for there, framed in the opening of the trap-way, was the beautiful face of Nora Avleen!

“Dinny! Dinny!”

He started, almost staggeringly, to his feet.

It was all so bewildering that he could not understand.

“Dinny Reardon, ye dear lad, wake up!” came Nora’s high-pitched, rousing tone. “Look, now! I’m lowerin’ a rope!”

Down came the length of hempen line.

Dennis touched it, wonderingly.

Then he came back to earth—to the need of the moment.

For Nora Avleen’s peril was not a whit less than his own.

“Can ye climb a rope, Dinny?” cried the girl, tremulously.

“Can a fly walk on the ceilin’?” he retorted.

He laid hard hold of the rope, tested it, then began to climb slowly, easily.

“Hurry, Dinny, for the love of heaven!” cried the colleen, desperately.

Nora’s sweet voice, more than anything else, stirred him on.

He climbed with all the vigor of those strong young muscles trained by hard work back in dear old Erin!

Nora’s helping hands were under his shoulders as he reached the trap-way.

But now other sounds were heard below.

“’Tis the scoundrels coming to us!” cried Nora, leaping to her feet and trembling. “Sure, they heard the blows of me axe!”

“Then ’tis little toime there is left!” cried Dennis, for he, too, heard the sound of rushing feet below them.

His eyes followed the rope, and he saw that one end had been made fast to the leg of a bed.

Like a flash he bounded over, untying the rope.

Trailing the freed rope on his arm, Dennis passed the other arm around Nora.

“Come!” he thrilled. “The foire’s on this soide av the house!”

Fleetly they fled through a dark hallway into a room on another side of the house.

Dennis softly closed the door and bolted it just as some

one rushed from the head of the stairs to the room over the workshop.

Dennis was at the window, dangling his rope with a calculating—swiftly reckoning—eye.

Below was the automobile, though no one of his enemies was in sight at this moment.

Around the leg of a heavy dresser near the window Dennis hitched one end of his rope.

“’Twon’t go t’ the ground, but ’twill go near enough!” he calculated, as he looked down. “Nora, colleen!”

She ran swiftly to his side.

“Yer arms around me neck, colleen!” he whispered, tensely.

But Nora, who had brought the axe with her, leaned to throw it down to the ground.

“What for?” whispered the Irish lad, hoarsely, catching at her arm.

“Ye may need it for defense!” quivered Nora.

“Oi couldn’t use it av Oi did,” he retorted, huskily. “Oi have jist been prayin’.”

Then standing on the sill, he drew the colleen up beside him.

Stooping, with his right hand he clutched at the rope. Then he swung off.

That wrench threatened to tear his arm from the socket, but down he slid, never minding how the rope cut his hand in the descent.

His eyes below, he managed, just as they came close to the end of the rope, to get his left hand also on the strands.

Thus he stopped their descent for the moment.

“Nora, darlin’, we must drop more than a dozen feet,” he whispered.

“Drop, Dinny! We’re together, anyway!”

With a prayer in half a dozen words, Dennis Reardon let go the rope altogether.

Down they shot, Dennis landing on his feet again, and bounding up.

The trick saved Nora from any jar.

“Oh, Dinny!”

Not letting the girl out of his arms, Dennis ran softly for the automobile, not more than twenty-five yards away.

In he leaped, still bearing Nora in his arms.

Dennis had never been in an automobile in his life, but he had seen a few started, and he had something of an idea how the thing was done.

Now Nora’s peril, not his, sharpened his wits.

No sooner had he released his arm from around the girl than he bent over the lever.

Shove!

Throb!

The wheels began to revolve slowly.

Further over, Dennis shoved the lever, just as Clark, Abbott and Tom rushed around the end of the house, and just at the same instant that Davies, bounding down the stairs, fled through an open door.

Rattle! Chug!

“There they go! Stop ’em!” roared Clark.

But the auto had started, and now Dennis, with both hands on the steering wheel, was trying to find out how to steer the machine.

By good luck he guessed right.

Down the driveway leaped the big car.

Crack! Following that first shot came a fusillade.

With his left arm Dennis roughly forced Nora down to her knees in front of the seat.

He bent low himself, for those bullets, still coming fast, were not badly aimed.

As they neared the gateway the firing ceased.

By good guessing the boy had managed to turn the wheel rightly at the gateway.

By this time he had gained a fair idea of how to keep the machine going, and how to steer it on the country roads.

So he resolved upon running straight ahead to the next town, which, he guessed, could not be many miles away.

They were going at close to eighteen miles an hour, so it was not many minutes ere they saw ahead some clustered buildings of the next village.

As soon as he caught sight of the grouped houses, Dennis began to experiment with the machinery to see if he could stop the car.

He found that he could, and did.

Then, running on slowly, he stopped before a store over which there seemed to be living quarters.

"Come on out, Nora," he murmured, leaping to the ground and reaching out his arms to her. "Av Oi lave ye there, 'tis afraid Oi am thot the tank car'd carry ye on away from me."

Really laughing, Nora bounded lightly to the ground, sustained by his arms.

Then a vigorous assault Dennis began on the door of the building.

The store-keeper came down to them.

Together they led Nora up to the man's wife, who received her in wonder, but with true motherliness.

Then Dennis and the store-keeper busied themselves indeed at the telephone.

Folks back in Hick's Harbor were notified to be on the lookout.

Word came back that the explosion of Davies' mine had rocked the town.

"An' we didn't hear it at all, at all," muttered the boy. "Or ilse we thought it th' rocking av the car."

The nearest deputy sheriff was notified, and citizens to the number of a score were roused to meet him, armed, at Hick's Harbor.

The deputy and three men soon arrived at the store.

They went off promptly in the automobile.

Then Dennis Reardon, thoroughly worn out, almost crept up the stairs to the store-keeper's family and Nora.

The Welshman they found dead, not a hundred yards from the wreck of his house.

His head had been staved in by a flying fragment of rock from the explosion.

Tom Avleen disappeared and was not caught.

But the next forenoon hunting parties came upon Clark and Abbott.

After firing a few shots, which injured none of the posse, the crooks surrendered to the law.

Tom Avleen showed up later.

But, by that time, Dennis had so well explained things to the police that Tom was never molested.

Tom's first start with the Welshman had been an innocent enough one.

Avleen really believed that his skill as a machinist was being made use of properly by a real inventor.

By the time that Tom Avleen discovered the truth, he felt that he was hopelessly a criminal, and that nothing remained but to stay one.

But the authorities, much wiser, were glad to feel that so skilful a man with tools as Tom Avleen was much better off among the ranks of honest men.

So, as it turned out, Tom Avleen's name was never mentioned in the newspaper accounts of the sensational affair.

To this day Tom Avleen's neighbors and acquaintances do not know that he was ever, in any way, connected with the notorious but now almost-forgotten gang of the Welshman, Davies.

Denny Reardon had not forgotten how Reporter Larry Fitzgerald had befriended him on his first day in the New World.

Dennis, at first, would talk to no reporter save Fitzgerald.

So that lucky reporter had, for his newspaper, the first full account of the startling story that was published.

Close to eighteen thousand dollars was recovered from Clark and Abbott, each.

That represented their share of the funds stolen from the safe of Lawrence & Co.

But the most astonishing development that came out, for Mr. Lawrence and our hero, was contained in the confessions of Clark and Abbott.

Pritchard, the head night-watchman at the bank, had been their accomplice in the robbery.

It was Pritchard who had struck down our hero from behind.

Then the night-watchman, with a harness previously prepared, had bound and gagged himself cleverly enough to fool the green Irish lad in his excitement.

It was a highly exciting day for some people when Clark and Abbott made their confessions at Police Headquarters in New York.

Mr. Lawrence was with Dennis at headquarters when Abbott and Clark, thoroughly cowed, were rattling off their confessions.

They had confessed to six robberies, when Denny turned to his former employer, muttering:

"Bedad, Oi want to hear no more! 'Tis enough to make anny honest man feel sick!"

"Oh, yes, you want to hear them make a few more confessions," smiled the lad's former employer.

"Oi do?" cried Dennis, in amazement.

"Decidedly."

"Whoy?"

"Because nearly all the robberies these fellows are confessing to were on the safes of members of the American Bankers' Protective Association."

"Whoy should thot intherest me, sor?"

"Why, the association always offers a reward for the capture of the thieves."

"It does, does it?"

"Certainly, my lad, and you are the sole proper claimant for these rewards."

"What koind av rewards?"

"Good, solid, United States cash!" replied Mr. Lawrence, laughingly. "So far, as I figure, there are twenty thousand dollars in rewards coming to you."

Dennis gasped. He tried to repeat the wonderful amount over after his late employer, but could not.

"So, you see, you have a great interest in these confessions," went on Mr. Lawrence.

After that Dennis sank into a chair.

With pencil and paper in his hands, he listened absorbedly, keeping track of the number of confessions.

In all, the crooks confessed to eighteen jobs as having been done by the Davies crowd.

"Ar-re they goin' t' talk no more?" demanded Denny, disappointedly, when, at length, the prisoners were led from the room.

"I guess they've confessed to about all they ever could have done," laughed the detective.

Dennis got seventy thousand dollars in rewards, in all.

Naturally, he didn't care to go back to his former employment.

While he was waiting for the association to pay the money, Mr. Lawrence, who had offered to collect for the boy, acted as his banker, advancing him what money he needed.

Nora, who had been brought to New York while waiting for tidings of her still absent brother, went to live with a woman whom Father Ryan selected.

In the meantime, Dennis had sent his mother a letter, carrying all the good news and containing money enough to bring her to this country in style.

The day that the money for the rewards was actually deposited to the green Irish lad's credit, Dennis Reardon, looking wonderfully up-to-date in the best clothes that New York tailors could provide, went to call on Nora.

"Little colleen," he murmured, tenderly, "Oi've got all me money at last."

"Have ye, now?" cried Nora, her eyes shining with delight.

"Oi mane our money, acushla."

"Our money?" echoed Nora.

"Would Oi iver have got out av thot house, av it hadn't been for the swatest colleen in the world?" he demanded.

"Maybe I helped ye," Nora admitted.

"So, acushla, the money belongs t' the two av us. But, av we divide it, thot's only thir-rtty-foive thousand dollars apiece."

"Sure, that much is a fortune for any one," glowed Nora.

"But think, acushla, av we live together we don't have to divide it. We can spind it all together!"

"What are ye meaning?" asked Nora, looking up at him.

"Sure, Father Ryan says he's willin'," pressed Dennis, eagerly, slipping an arm around her waist. "All we're waitin' for is the colleen. Nora, d' ye moind what 'tis thot the folks at home loike best av all in loife? A bit av a country place, with th' horses an' the cattle an' the chickens, an'—an'—an' the colleen!"

"Would there be trips to the city?" asked Nora, musingly.

"Acushla, ye can have a sayson ticket t' the city!"

"An' would ye be going back to Ireland, Dinny?"

"Wanst a year, maybe. But America is good enough for me, most of the time! An' you, Nora?"

"I ought to be contented where my gossoon is," she replied, looking up into his eyes.

They have the little country place now, and Denny's mother is with them. With money enough, they haven't a care in the world.

Tom Avleen has turned up, lives straight, and is part owner in a paying machine-shop.

But the young people? They're actually the happiest in the world.

Lucky? These young people carved out all their luck for themselves!

Green? You wouldn't think so, if you could see Dennis Reardon these days!

He's an American citizen now, and a proud one!

THE END.

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